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OR,

TULIP TILLY'S TRUMP HAND.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

MISTAKEN IDENTITY.

"PARD DICK, it looks as if they have got us in a box."

"It does look that way, Nancy Jane. I am afraid you will be sorry you chipped in."

"HALT!" DICK ORDERED. "PULL RIGHT UP WHERE YOU ARE, GALLOOTS;"

"Not a bit of it! I like your style, as I told you, and I also told you that I wanted just one more adventure with you before I went home. I'll back you up, you bet!"

"Oh, I don't doubt that for a moment. You are clear grit."

"Well, thank you; but what do you think they mean?"

"Business from the word go!"

"Then we must mean the same. Just call them to a halt, or we shall have to open fire. I don't like being jumped in this fashion, as you folks of the West call it. I like to do some of the jumping myself. I'll open fire if they don't halt!"

It was a thrilling moment.

Night as dark as Erebus, and a place as wild as the road to Gehenna.

Deadwood Dick and his girl pard, Nancy Jane, so called, had been forced to seek shelter from pursuers.

Coming down the gulch and into the wild and rugged place, where we find the pards, were a score or more of the denizens of the neighboring camp of Reilley, some of them bearing torches.

They were wildly vociferating, telling what they would do when they caught the persons they were after, and were then coming so near that Dick's pard was becoming a little nervous, although a woman of nerve and backed up by such a pard as Deadwood Dick, Jr.

They had reached a spot where several huge boulders offered protection. These rocks they located by the glare from the torches, and Dick, pushing her in behind them, bade her crouch down, while he whipped out a gun and leveled it over the top of the highest boulder.

"Halt!" he ordered. "Pull right up where you are, galoots, or there will be weeping in the wigwams of some of you because of your goneness. What is the meaning of this hullabaloo, anyhow? What have I or my pard done that you should set upon us like this?"

"We'll show ye what ye have done, cuss' ye!" cried out the foremost of the men with the torches, albeit all had come to a sudden halt. "Come out hyer and give yourselves up, and then we'll talk business. We know ye, and we know what has brought ye here, and you have got to come to our terms before you do any further huntin' in these diggin's!"

"I know what you say, my man," rejoined Dick, blandly, "but I'll be hanged if I know what you are talking about."

"You don't, hey? Mebbly you will say that you ain't here lookin' fer Job Welcher's box o' money?"

"Never heard of either Job Welcher or his box of money, and don't know anything about it. If that is all you want of us you have run us to cover for nothing."

"Is that straight?"

"Straight as a string, I assure you, gentlemen."

"And ain't you Doc Dalton?"

"Doc Dalton? Not much I ain't."

"Then who the dickens are ye?"

"Well, call me Felix Fox for short."

"If that's ther case we have made a mistake and had our run all fer nawthin'; so come out and show yerself."

"Do you mean square?"

"Of course we do; what do you take us for?"

"Well, I didn't know what to take you for, that's the truth. You reminded me of a pack of hyenas the way you came tearing along after us a minute ago."

"Well, you will find that we are just citizens of Reilley, all in good and reg'lar standin', as we'll show you if you will go home with us. It will be our treat; one on us."

"Dick, I wouldn't trust them!" whispered Nancy Jane.

"Why not, pard?"

"They have got over it too quick; they haven't even had a good look at you yet. It may be a trick they are trying to work on you."

"Perhaps you are right, pard, but I think not. I think they made a mistake and now see that they did. They gave us a tight brush, but I guess they found they ran up against a snag when we came to a place where we could make a stand."

"Well, be careful!"

"Come, what d'ye say?" the spokesman demanded.

"Why, that is a fair offer, stranger, and I don't mind accepting, if it be bona fide."

"It ain't nothin' else, be sure o' that. Come, prance out hyar till we git a full squint at ye. Even ef you meant fight we are five to one against you and you wouldn't have a ghost of a show."

"Don't you bet too heavy on that, my friend," admonished Dick. "We are in a dandy place, right here, and I have got a couple of five-spots that would be good for ten of you, straight, for I never miss. So don't gamble high on that hand, or you may lose."

"You have got gall, anyhow."

"Have to have, in this world. But who are you? I have told you who I am."

"I am Ben Welcher, son of the Job Welcher you heard me mention, and when I heard that you was prowling around here in Devil's Gulch, I made up my mind that you was lookin' for my dad's box of money."

"Well, Mr. Welcher, this smacks of romance, truly. Should like to hear more about this box of money when we get acquainted."

"An' we ain't gettin' acquainted a heap fast, you staying there."

"Plenty of time; no need to rush matters. Who is this Doc Dalton, whom you took me to be? It is quite evident that he would get a warm reception if you could lay hands upon him."

"Well, you can tell your folks that he would, for fair!" the speaker for the band exclaimed. "He is a son of the man who was my dad's pard, and he holds half of the secret to the hiding place of the box of money, and you bet your life he won't walk off with it if I know it!"

"Don't blame you, if it is rightfully yours. Well, if you promise us a square deal we will come out."

"Haven't I done that? Come right out and go with us to camp."

"All right; but don't forget that I am on the shoot some and you don't want to try on any funny business with me."

"You may be on the shoot all right, but your talk is the talk of a squaw, as the Injuns say. If you are not a coward, come out and get acquainted, for we have offered as fair as we can."

"I am cautious because I have a lady with me!" asserted Dick. "The way you set upon us leads me to put a whole lot of salt on what you say now. But I'll trust you, with fair warning that if you go back on your word I will make you eat crow, every mother's son of you!"

"Haw! haw! haw!" laughed another of the crowd. "Thar' ain't no squaw talk about that ther, Ben Welcher."

"Don't seem to be, that's a fact," agreed Ben.

"Come, Nancy Jane," Dick turned as he addressed his pard, but she was not to be seen.

He looked closer, but she was gone, and there was nothing near him but the bare boulders. Where had she disappeared to?

"Pard!" he exclaimed. "Where are you?"

"What's up?" demanded Welcher.

"Why, my pard is missing; that is what is up. Come this way with your torches, quick!"

"Say, is this hyer a trick?" demanded the spokesman for the party from the camp. "If it is, you needn't expect us to bite, that is all. You come out here and show yourself."

"No trick about it. I am only one to twenty. Seems to me there is some squaw talk on your side now. Come here with your lights, I say, till I see where my pard is. Nancy! Nancy Jane! What the mischief does it mean, anyhow?" and Dick stepped forth, demanding a light.

"Why don't ye give him a light, Ben?" urged the fellow at his side. "He ain't a-goin' to eat ye, et ain't likely, and ef he does et will be your treat, an' I'll be on hand as sure as my cognomen aire Happy Harkins! Come on an' see what ther feller wants. Thar' was two of 'em, that we know, and if one is missin', we want to know ther whyfor."

CHAPTER II.

BROKEN PLEDGE.

Deadwood Dick, indeed, was puzzled.

His girl pard had gone off without a word, or a sound, and he feared that all was not right.

It was something so out of the usual that he did not know what to make of it, and yet he had to believe that she had gone of her own free will. If she had been carried off he must have heard the noise of it.

"Don't parley," he called; "come on with your lights!"

"Hyar we come!" responded Happy Harkins, and on they came, and reaching the boulders, they flashed their lights around.

As they had come near with their lights Dick had cast a hurried look over the ground and something white caught his eye.

He picked it up. It was a scrap of paper with just three words and no more written upon it, which he hurriedly read, and as the men with the torches came near he concealed the slip.

The three words were:

"See you later."

Then Dick knew that Nancy Jane had gone off of her own accord, and guessed at the reason in the same moment.

Having declared her belief that these men were only trying to decoy Dick and herself into trouble, she had dodged the decoy, and of course, would be heard later; that was her "style."

"Where is yer pard?" demanded Ben Welcher, looking around suspiciously.

"Just what I want to know," iterated Dick, his gun still in hand. "That is what I called you here for, but you were an infernal while in coming with the lights."

"I take et ter be only a trick," one man blurted out.

"Why so, Hank?" demanded Ben.

"So's one could get away. They seen we had 'em dead to rights, as it was, and one has vamoosed."

"You have a big head, my friend," spoke up Deadwood Dick. "If that had been the object, would I have called for you to hurry with the lights? I thought some sad fate had happened to my pard."

"What could happen?"

"Didn't know but we had run upon a fissure into which she had fallen."

"Wull, ye see thar' ain't none, and I don't take much stock in that story. I believe that Hank Riggle here is more'n half right," asserted Welcher.

"Well, no use arguing with you, I suppose," retorted Dick. "You will have it

your own way anyhow. Go back to your camp, since you ought to be satisfied that I and my pard are not the persons you first took us to be."

"I ain't a whole lot satisfied on that point yet," declared Welcher.

"Well, you have got my word for it, and I don't see what more you can get. Go back to your camp and I will hunt up my pard alone, if you are not inclined to help me willingly. I think you have only frightened her out of her wits, and that I will find her somewhere up the gulch."

A secret signal must have been given, unobserved by Dick, for at that instant, despite the fact that he was "ready for business," some of the men leaped suddenly upon him.

The attack was so quickly made that in spite of his struggles Deadwood Dick was speedily made a prisoner, disarmed, with his hands tied behind him.

"We'll attend to looking for her ourselves," then announced Welcher. "You need not give yourself any concern about her; we can find her if she is in the gulch—or anywhere else, and she'll soon join you at Reilley, Mr. Doc Dalton."

"Felix Fox, if you please," corrected Dick.

"Ha, ha! That is too slick a name to be real, Dodger Dalton. I think we know you hard enough."

"You never made a bigger mistake in your lives; but no use trying to convince you on that point, I suppose. What are you going to do with me, believing that I am Doc Dalton?"

"Wull, we ruther think that a leetle wholesome hanging would do you good," suggested Happy Harkins, a hard-looking customer.

"That is it," added Welcher.

"You will give me a fair chance to prove up, I suppose," suggested Dick.

"Oh, yes; you will have a trial, of course. But enough of this palaver; let's get down to business."

"That will suit me better," said Dick.

"Don't care whether it does or not," retorted Welcher. "You will find that we do business at Reilley without regard to the other feller. Two or three of us will take this feller to camp, boys, and the rest of you go on and find that gal, and don't come in without her."

"All right, pard, we'll fetch her."

"There may be a double trick about this. Maybe they had the box of money, and she has sloped to hide it."

"By Juniper! looks like et!" cried Happy Harkins. "How much reward to the feller what gits et? I have a notion to go on that trail. But my stumjack is callin' loud fer a drink jest about now."

"You had one just as we left camp."

"And I'll have another soon's we git back, you bet!"

"Well, come with me, you and Bill; the rest of you go on and find the gal, and make sure of her."

Acting under these orders, all but two of the men, besides Ben Welcher, hastened on up the gulch, while Welcher and the other two, with one torch, conducted their prisoner in the opposite direction.

It was galling for the astute Deadwood Dick, for now he painfully realized that Nancy Jane had been right in her guess concerning the men and their intention.

Dick could have made a hot fight and a good stand, even against the great odds, but perhaps it was better as it had turned out, for his girl pard might have fared badly at their hands.

He hoped that she would get safely away, for more reasons than one.

"Well, now that you have got me," he said to Welcher, as they went along, "how are you going to prove that I am the man you think?"

"We'll leave it to men who have known ye," was the answer. "If they say you are Doc Dalton, why, Doc Dalton you are, and nothin' you can say will change ther verdict."

"Then you will give me no chance to defend myself?"

"Wull, ef you kin prove in the face of that that you ain't Dalton, we'll have to take it, of course."

"Then there is only one thing I ask."

"Name et."

"Give me a fair chance to prove up."

"Oh, yes; you will have a trial, as I said, and you will have a show."

In due time they entered the camp, when Dick discovered that Reilley was one of the wildest holes he had met in many a day.

As they entered, a street fight was in active progress, and pistols were crackling on every hand, while men were wildly yelling and hooting, some of them too full of liquor to know what the fight was about, or to realize the risks they were taking of stopping a bullet.

Welcher and those with him quickly dodged out of range and took shelter behind some of the shanties until the fuss was over.

At last the firing ceased, and the yelling subsided; then Welcher proceeded down the street.

Two or three dead men were lying stretched out on the thoroughfare, no one giving them heed, and the crowd were making for the various open doors, hunting for further "fun."

Welcher walked in the direction of the Shanty Palace, the only hotel the camp boasted of, but before they had gone far the prisoner was remarked. Then a shout arose in the camp and the denizens came pouring out anew, ready for anything further that might contribute to their enjoyment.

CHAPTER III.

A GAME OF BLUFF.

"Hillo! Hillo!" cried one loud-mouthed brawler. "What have ye got thar', Ben Welcher?"

"That remains to be seen," was answered. "Don't crowd the mourners here, but come along if you want to. I reckon Judge Lynch will have a trial in the mornin', if nothin' breaks."

"That's ther talk!" cried some one else. "Anything ter keep the ball rollin'. But say, who is ther feller ye have got thar'? Hang me ef he ain't a looker, fer fair! He's a reg'lar Texas Jack, fer looks, or would be if his hair was yaller instead of coal black."

Dick's appearance at that time commanded admiration. He was in fine flesh, his hair rested in a bed of coils on his shoulders, while his fine mustache and keen, magnetic eyes added to the charm.

"We want to find out who he is," was the answer. "Don't be too anxious, and you will see all in good time."

"All right, Welcher, you are ther doctor, seein' that you are mayor of this hyer camp and chief cook and bottle washer in general. We reckon that you know what you aire about."

"I presume I do."

"I hope et means a treat ther first thing, boyees," cried Happy Harkins.

All made their way to the Shanty Palace, and by the time that resort was reached the crowd was great.

The bar-room was a roomy place, and Ben Welcher and the man with him at once walked their prisoner to the center of the room.

A big lamp was suspended from the ceiling, with a tin reflector over it almost as big as an umbrella; so under it they halted their prisoner and faced him

around, calling out to the crowd as it came pouring into the room:

"Now, boys, take a look at this cuss and say who he is."

"Give et up!" cried one.

"Ask us somethin' easier," another followed.

But there were others still who sang out at once:

"Why, et's Doc Dalton, an' nobody else, that's who et is. Whar' did ye git him?"

"A little bigger and a little fatter, and some better lookin'," chipped in Happy Harkins, "but Doc Dalton all the same; hey, boyees?"

"Yes, yes! The Doc for sure!"

But there were others who said no, so it was an open question as to who the prisoner really was.

"You see," said Welcher, turning to Dick, "that settles it."

"Does it? I fail to see how."

"The crowd says so."

"Let's see if they do, before we go any further. All who think I am Doc Dalton, hold up your right hands."

Six, eight, maybe ten hands were seen, here and there in the room.

"Now, how many think that I am not Doc Dalton?" Dick next asked, well satisfied with the showing.

Twenty, at the very least, were instantly raised up into sight.

"Does it settle it?" asked Dick, calmly, turning to Welcher. "If you go by numbers it settles it in my favor."

It looked as if Dick's very presence was already winning friends for him, even there in that wild corner of nowhere. Something in that flashing glance commanded respect and sympathy.

"Let's see again," cried Welcher, leaping up onto a chair with a gun in his fist as he said it. "Now, you men of Reilley, how many of you agree with me that this feller is Doc Dalton? As many as do, jest put up your right flippers whar' we can see 'em."

The hands of more than half the crowd went up instantly.

"What do you think of that showing, prisoner?" demanded the mayor. "Now, how many think he is not Doc Dalton?" glaring around as if to challenge any one to say so if he dared.

At first not a hand appeared, but presently one was stuck up into view.

"Ha! it is you, is it, Jim Trivet?" cried Welcher, picking him out instantly. "I have had trouble with you before, and you still crop up, it seems. What makes you think this feller ain't Doc Dalton?"

"For the mighty good reason that he don't look enough like him."

"Mebby you forget that it is some years since Dalton was hyer."

"And maybe I knew him about as well as anybody when he was here. You have made a mistake this time, Welcher."

"You are the only man that thinks so, anyhow."

"Some others thought as I do at first."

"Why don't they say so now, then?"

The mayor glared around again with a scowl, and not one of the men who had before favored Dick dared to speak out.

"You see," Welcher added, "they have seen their mistake and have come over to the right side. I say this feller is Doc, the crowd says the same, and you are the only one who says otherwise."

"There is one other," spoke up Dick.

"Where—who?"

"I, myself. I assure you, my friends, that I am not the person named. Never saw him and never heard of him. I am Felix Fox, an all-around sport, and if I am given half a chance I will prove up to your entire satisfaction."

"I believe ye, for one," declared the man called Jim Trivet.

And Dick knew that still the others believed him, even though they did not dare speak out.

It was evident to Dick that Welcher ruled with an iron hand here, and that no one dared to oppose his despotic sway; so the prisoner well understood that he had fallen into bad hands in a bad place; that he was in one of the tightest danger-spots of his adventurous career.

"You leave this room," the mayor ordered, bringing his gun to bear upon Trivet. "You have made trouble before—in fact, are always making it, and I will give you just ten seconds to get your shadow off these walls."

Trivet went, without any retort—as he well knew was the wiser-course.

"I guess that about settles all doubts," observed Welcher, with a chuckle, looking at Dick. "The crowd says you are Doc Dalton."

"Well, if that is the case, let us suppose that I am. What is wanted of Doc Dalton? If I can fill the bill it may be a good service rendered to the real Dalton."

"See!" cried the mayor. "He owns up to it!"

"Nothing of the kind! I am not Dalton, but, taking your word for it that I am, what is required? Show down your hand."

CHAPTER IV.

CAGED IN THE COOLER.

The denizens of Reilley had never seen a cooler man.

There he was, with a rope as good as around his neck, according to the way things seemed to be shaping, and yet he was calm—almost unconcerned.

But, though a prisoner and helpless for the time being, Dick knew that he had at least two friends somewhere around—his girl pard and the man Trivet, who had been forced to leave the room.

"So you want to know what is wanted, do you?" said Welcher.

"That is the burden of my lament, Mr. Mayor," replied Dick.

"Well, since you are pretending that you do not know, I will tell you the little story."

"I am all ears, as the jackass said when the horse asked him why he hadn't any mane. Reel it off, and I will try to freeze fast to the main particulars as they waft along."

This provoked a light laugh, at which the mayor scowled.

"Years ago," related Welcher, "your father and mine, Job Welcher and Thomas Dalton, were partners here in a mine, the Blue Wasp, which was the richest in all this section, and to-day is paying royal returns to the rascals who pretend to own it."

"That sounds good. Maybe I am Doc Dalton. We'll see after a while."

That was said so dryly that all had to laugh.

"You have as good as confessed that you are," growled Welcher. "Well, the Injuns got troublesome, and our dads had to dust out with what they had and abandon the claim for a time. But they had put in enough work to hold it, and they had the mine claim recorded all right. They turned their gold into money, put that in a box and cached it away in Devil's Gulch, making a map so that any one could find it if they got the worst of it with the Injuns."

"I am after you."

"Well, that map they divided between them, and each sent his half to a son at home, yourself and myself, with instructions what to do in case they never showed up—which they had little hope of doing, for the Injuns wur' all around them and mighty bad jest at that time. And they

never did show up, either, which was proof enough that they went under. Well, you and I set out to find that box of money when we came to age, and one night you robbed me of my half of the paper that was to find it, and you gave me the slip, but I got here on the ground first and I have staved you off ever since."

"Any more?" asked Dick. "That is pretty good, so far."

"Well, yes, there is more. You have got to fork over those papers or swing high, just as you prefer. There is no fooling now. This mine is worth an untold fortune, and is being worked, while I am being robbed daily. If I can only secure that box I shall find in it the papers that will prove me the rightful owner, and my friends here will see that the property is put in my possession. That is the long and the short of it. Now, I demand those papers, or to know where they are. But, I suppose that pard of yours has them, and as soon as we get her we shall get hold of the right end of the string. No doubt she will hide them, and there will be a deuce of a time getting at them; but we'll have 'em if we have to burn you at the stake."

The man had proved that he could use fairly good language when he chose to do so.

As he ceased speaking the rougher class in the room gave a cheer.

"Well, you wind up with a warm remark. But, where is my share in this thing to come in, if I am Doc Dalton, as you say? In that case, half of the concern must belong to me."

"Not a foot of it, curse you! You forfeited it when you stole my half of the paper, but I have got a guard over the box so that you cannot get hold of that. I could not find it without the paper, and I was determined that you should not find it with the papers."

"And that was what led to the attack you made on me and my pard to-night?"

"Exactly. Got word that you were prowling in Devil's Gulch, and we went for you. And that is the main reason why I know you are Doc Dalton. Now, what reply do you make to the charge?"

"You want it now?"

"Right here and now."

"I thought maybe you would wait till my trial came off."

"Curse you! It will depend on how civil you are whether this isn't your trial for good and all."

"You seem to be a particularly bad man to deal with, my friend. You are inclined to have it all your own way, it seems. But, as you want my answer, without waiting for a caucus, here you have it:

"In the first place, I am not Doc Dalton. In the next place, I have never seen the paper to which you refer. In the third place, I look upon you as being probably as great a rascal, or greater, than you would make Dalton out to be—"

"Curse you! Take—"

"Ben, what yer thinkin' 'bout?"

The mayor had jerked up his gun at Dick as he spoke, and only for the interference of a third party, Dick would have got the bullet.

A rough-looking fellow had knocked the weapon up, and the bullet went splintering through the side of the building over the heads of the crowd.

Deadwood Dick had not even winked, that any one could notice, and all the toughs of that tough crowd looked upon him as a wonder.

"What are you thinking about, Dan Buck?" Welcher snarled, turning upon the man as if about to shoot him down for interfering. "What business had you to chip in?"

"Ef he has got a secret that you want, you are goin' about et in a poor way to get it, that is all."

"Well, you are right; that's so. Thank this man for your life, Doc Dalton. You don't owe it to me, I can tell you that."

"I am quite aware of it. You would have shot down a perfectly innocent man in cold blood. That seems to be your style."

"An innocent man, indeed! I'll show you when I get hold of that pard of yours. She'll own up to the truth or fare worse; you can bet on that!"

"You will get the truth out of her, you can depend on that," Dick answered. "That is to say, if you get her at all, which I doubt."

"Further proof that you are the man I take you to be," cried the mayor, "I leave it to the men of this camp if I don't make a pretty good case against you in all I have charged."

"That's what you do," some fellow shouted.

"Come, let's take a drink," suggested Happy Harkins. "Who says treat?"

"It is about my treat, I guess," spoke up Deadwood Dick. "You will find a little bird right here in my left vest pocket, my man; take it and make it fly, with the regards of yours truly, Felix Fox, the all-around sport."

Happy Harkins was at his side in three strides.

"I am yours to command, sir," he declared, and before any one could have interfered he had the coin. "Come right along, galoots!" he sang out.

"What did you do that for?" demanded Welcher, irately.

"To shut his mouth," answered Dick.

But, of course, it was to gain the goodwill of the bum and others that the observant detective had volunteered to treat. It would "pay," he judged.

"Well, I am goin' to shut you up in the cooler for the rest of this night, and in the morning, when we have got that pard of yours, you will get another hearing, which will decide your fate. If you don't come down with that paper, you will swing as high as the fabled goose!"

A portion of the crowd cheered, and the mayor ordered the prisoner to be taken to the calaboose.

This was done and Dick soon found himself in a strong prison, with hands still tied behind his back in such a way that it was not likely he would get them free.

To use a Westernism, he had been "jumped" in the worst manner.

CHAPTER V.

RUMOR OF A RUCTION.

It was some hours after Deadwood Dick had been incarcerated in the camp "cooler" before Hank Riggle and his men returned.

Indeed, Reilley was beginning to grow quiet for the night, but the mayor was up and waiting to receive the other prisoner, for he had not a doubt but that the woman would be found.

He was in the Hog Pen Saloon when his men came in.

"Well, where is she?" he demanded, the moment Hank showed himself.

"That is what I would like to know," was the response. "She wasn't to be found anywheres."

"Then, by the howling coyotes, you didn't look well!" cried Welcher, angrily. "I've a notion to put a bullet into you for playing me false, as I believe you have done! You had no business not to find her!"

"You are too mighty hasty on the shoot, sometimes, mayor, and you have made

mistakes in your time, to my own knowledge. You would make one this time. We have made a thorough search for that woman, girl, or whatever she was, but not a sign of her could we find."

"I told you not to come back without her."

"I know you did, but I didn't take that to mean that I was to stay away forever."

"Well, it is more proof, then, that the fellow we have got is Doc Dalton. And I am afraid it is proof, too, that they found the treasure box before we got onto them. But now I'm stumped to know how to proceed."

"Stumped? Not a stump! Just torture your man a little and make him tell what he knows. We can get the truth out of him if we go about it in the right way I don't doubt. If they got the box of money and the more important paper, he knows where the woman has gone with them."

"Well, maybe you have hit it right."

"That I have, you bet! And we'll hit him right, too, when we hang him up by his big toes and build a slow fire under him. He will then tell what he knows in a hurry!"

"Riggle, you are a devil, and about as merciless."

"Ha! ha! As if I could give you points in any game of that kind."

In their talk together there was little sign of the rough Western in what they said.

"And how about the Blue Wasp?" asked Riggle. "You know that we must get possession right away or lose everything. In another week it will have been worked just long enough for them to hold it and to make their claim secure beyond any procedure we can bring. So we must break their continuous possession this very week."

"Right you are, of course," agreed Welcher. "I have been hoping that the document would show up and so put the property into our hands. We'll have to prepare to carry out your plan. I see no other course. That paper we must have."

Meanwhile, Deadwood Dick had thrown himself upon the floor of his prison to sleep, seeing that it was useless to try to get his hands free.

He had slept he could not tell how long, when he was awakened by a knocking, as if some one was seeking admission at the door, and yet it was not loud enough for that, either.

Dick had to listen for some moments after opening his eyes before he found what had awakened him.

Then he found it was a knocking under the floor.

Thoroughly awake now, Dick rolled over on the floor to the spot and thumped, as well as he could, in response.

There was silence for a moment; then came the signal again, and he could no longer doubt its meaning.

Again he responded, in the same number of knocks, and then—

"Are you alone?" was asked, in a low voice.

"Yes," Dick answered, in the same guarded tone.

"Good enough! I want to have a talk with you. Wish I could help you out, but I can't do that till morning."

"Who are you?"

"Dan Buck, the fellow who saved your life in the saloon."

"Glad you are on my side, Daniel, but I don't see what you can do for me."

"I can't help you till morning, for I have no way of getting in there and you have no way of getting out; but I may be able to help that pard of yours if you can tell me where she is."

"The trouble is I don't know where you would look for her. Her disappearance was a mystery to me, the same as it was to the others, but I think she is all safe and that she will turn up."

"Why did she leave you?"

"I think it was because she distrusted Welcher and his gang. She was sharper than I, in that."

"Are you or are you not the party Ben Welcher took you to be?"

"I am not, decidedly; never heard of Doc Dalton."

"Then, of course, you have not found that box of money."

"I have found nothing of the kind. His story is all romance to me."

"Well, that being so, stranger, we must do all we can for you, and I may say you have more friends here than you think for, maybe."

"That is good news, anyhow."

"But Welcher is a terror, and is so feared that no one cares to speak openly against any of his doings or plans. But he is nearing the end of his rope, and I hope this affair will wind up his career here."

"Well, friend Dan, if I can contribute to that result I shan't regret this little unpleasantness."

"Well said, Mr. Fox! You are the true metal, that I see. But—that pard of yours; can you tell me anything about her?—how she will be likely to look, if she puts in an appearance at this camp, as I suppose, now, she will do, and as I want her to do, too, because she can help me, and I know I can be of big help to her."

In an instant Deadwood Dick was suspicious. Was not this the mayor himself, and the whole thing a trick?

CHAPTER VI.

THE FRIEND UNSEEN.

"You are asking too much, now," Dick protested, now on his guard.

"Because you don't know how to answer, or because you don't want to trust me?" asked his unseen inquisitor.

"Well, I suppose you will hold your own view of that, no matter what I may tell you," responded Dick. "The fact of the business is, she may have deserted me and left me to shake for myself."

"A great pard, she, to do that! You don't think that, my friend, I am sure," was the unseen's rebuke.

Dick could not but feel this rebuke.

"She may come," he admitted; "you will have to be on the watch. You can bet on her, if she does chip in."

"Welcher and all of his henchmen will be watching, you can depend on that, and if you could give me a cue that would give me the inside track—"

"I can't; I don't know in what guise she will come."

"That is all I can say on that line, then. When you get free, to-morrow, as I mean you shall, will you call at the office of the Blue Wasp mine?"

"What for?"

"If you get free, you will owe it, in part, to the head of that concern."

"Then I shall do myself the honor to call on him, most certainly. For whom shall I inquire when I go there, if I go?"

"Ask for Samuel Harding."

"All right; I will remember the name."

"And, by the way, if he is not in and you don't find him right away, do not seek him too closely; just keep on calling till you find him in. See?"

"Yes, I see, but not very clearly. However, I will do as you say."

"I will say that he will be looking for you, though, and so you may not have to call more than once. I thought I would warn you, so that you would not weary."

"That is all right, and much obliged to you. By the way, how the deuce did you manage to get under this building? I thought it was built flat down in the earth, and it certainly seems to be, from the inside. I took all that in when I was brought here."

"I had a friend who was caged here once, and I set out to tunnel him out before he was hanged, but I was just a day too late. I had made my way this far, and was going to saw through the floor the next night, but on that day this brute of a mayor got his back up about something and took poor Tom out and stretched his neck without any warning to anybody."

"What is to hinder you from sawing through now and aiding my escape in that manner?"

"Because I don't want to leave the camp, just yet, and it would cost me my life to stay, after doing that. They would trace the tunnel straight to my shanty, just in the rear of this calaboose."

"Oh, ho! That is the lay, is it? Well, Daniel, don't take any such risk on my account. Daniel, tell me this, before you go:

"Are you acquainted with the man they call Jim Trivet?"

"You can set it down for a fact that I am, pardner. Anything you want to say to him?"

"Will you carry a word to him from me, and whisper into his ear when you get a chance that D. D. got his letter?"

"I opine that same won't kill him with surprise, pardner!"

"Then you think he suspects who I am?"

"That is it. He knows."

"All right, then. Tell him I will make a meeting with him as soon as it can be done safely after I get out of this fix."

"Don't bother about that; leave that part of it to Jim. You can safely trust him to bring it about in good time. Meanwhile, don't forget to go to the Blue Wasp. Now, my friend, good-night. I've work yet to do, so must be off. Make yourself as comfortable as possible, for you are not likely to be molested before morning."

Dick heard some slight sounds as the man moved off through the tunnel.

Just then came a heavy rap on the door.

"What's the matter in there?" a voice demanded.

"What do you find the matter?" responded Dick.

"Who are you talkin' to?"

"A fellow I like pretty well—myself! Can't I have that privilege?"

"No; you can't, so just let up on it, that is all. Et sounded to me as if you had somebody in there."

"Maybe you have been taking a nap," suggested Dick. "If you think everything is not right, come right in and see me. I would like to have a drink of water, anyhow, if it wouldn't be too much trouble."

The guardsman unlocked the door and entered.

Within it was as dark as a dungeon, but when the door was opened the light of the moon shone in.

The man looked around, evidently having not been quite fully satisfied that everything was right, and perhaps having been asleep on his post, as Dick had said.

"I am growling about these cords on my wrists, for they are cutting like sin. I won't ask you to monkey with them, however, for that might get you into trouble. If you will give me a drink of water I won't trouble you further."

"It would be all my life is worth to touch your bonds, pard. I will give you the drink though," the man said, not unkindly.

He stepped outside again, and brought in a dipper of water.

"Did you have it on hand?" asked Dick.

"Yes, for my own use."

"Well, I thank you, and heartily. Can you tell me at what hour in the morning they are going to hang me?"

"I hope they won't have to hang ye at all, pard. You are too durn much a man to be treated to a necktie. And right there I would like ter give you a bit of advice."

"What is it? I'm open to anything."

"You had better be civil to the boss. He is like powder, and you would have got your quieting pill if it hadn't been for Dan Buck."

"Yes, I am aware of that, and I think it will be a lesson to me to handle him a little more gently in the future. But, what about that fellow, Buck? He must be a good friend of your mayor's."

"Why do you think that?"

"If he hadn't been he would have got a dose himself."

"Well, he is. He is one of the boss's right-hand men and can afford to take some chances."

This was what Dick was getting at. He wanted to learn what opinion was held of the man. He had trusted him, but even yet held him with a good deal of distrust.

However, that was done, and Dick had taken the risk, but this new information raised his doubts about the man again.

"Does your mayor trust him?" he asked.

"Why, certainly."

"But, I suppose he will take care not to try to save my life again."

"I think you kin set it down fer a fact. Dan Buck is no fool, even if the boys do think so once in a while. But it won't do for me to be seen here with you, so I'll slope."

And he "sloped," locking the door after him, and Dick resumed his bed on the floor to court sleep once again.

CHAPTER VII.

RISE IN REBELLION.

Early next morning there was a shout in the camp, and by the volume of that shout it might have been judged that the Philistines had come to occupy the land.

But that would have been a mistake, for the shout was for Reilleyites and by the Reilleyites, as they came marching up the street in a goodly crowd, with Dan Buck in the van.

In front of Shanty Palace a halt was called.

Every man of them was armed, and there was a look of grim determination on every visage.

When they drew up before the hotel, in a semblance of military order, the shouting increased in volume, as a cheer was given for the camp and the people it contained.

"Hillo! Mayor!" sang out Buck, as soon as the cheer ended.

"Hillo! Mayor! Hillo! Hillo! Git up and tumble out hyer, and see what a mighty good-lookin' lot we aire!"

Needless to say, such shouting as this brought the sleepers forth in a hurry, and among them the mayor himself.

"What in sulphur is goin' on hyer?" he bellowed.

"We have come up fer inspection, boss," explained Dan. "Don't you think we are a dandy regiment?"

"You are a dasted lot of born fools!" was the rejoinder. "What do you mean by a racket like this, and bringin' me out of a sound sleep? For one cent I'd put a bullet in you, Dan Buck!"

"Why, I am ye'r right bower, boss!"

"Well, what do you want?"

"Want to know what you think of us, that's all."

"And I have told you, so get out of here as quick as you can!"

"Mebbe you haven't heard the news, boss? Et strikes me you must be ignorant of the fact that there is a young rebellion bubbling right here under your very nose."

"What in thunder do you mean?"

"Don't know the meaning of the word? Don't know what rebellion means?"

"Yes, but I don't know what you mean, you infernal idiot! Speak right out, or I'll play the fool-killer here and now!"

"Don't do that, boss, or you will spoil a good thing," warned Dan. "I am your right bower, every time, and we aire here to nip this thing in the bud for you, if you say so."

"If I say so! What do you think I would say if there is going to be any kind of a ruction here?"

"Yes; but we want terms."

"Terms! Confound you, what do you mean?"

"You are boss of this hyer camp of Reilley, ain't you?"

"Well, you will believe it, maybe, before you get through with me!"

"That is jest the p'int. We have come up to serve ye, and we mean to do it fer jest one favor."

"And what is that?"

"First let me tell ye about this rebellion."

"Well, why in thunder don't you tell me? What are you palavering about all this while?"

"To lead up to it easy, don't you see. There aire some people in this camp of Reilley that think you are too much boss, and they are gettin' ready to kick over the traces."

"Who are they?" the mayor roared. "Just mention one of them to me and see if I don't nip it in the bud."

"It is more than one, boss. You couldn't do it."

"But what were you drivin' at?"

"Thar's a good many people hyerabouts what think that your prisoner, that calls himself Felix Fox, is innocent of the charge against him, and they aire goin' to demand his release."

"Let 'em demand, and be hanged to 'em! If they cut up it will only make me bring him out and hang him in short order, and you can go back an' tell 'em so."

"That is comin' nearer to the p'int. We want that condition observed—that he ain't ter be hanged—"

"To blazes with you! I'll show you and them who is mayor of this camp—"

"We know who is mayor, that is why we aire here."

"You will get no conditions."

"Stop!" whooped a new voice. "Hold up! Call a stay of proceedin's! Declare an armistice till we all go and take a drink! Whose treat is it?"

It was Happy Harkins, who, sleeping a little sounder than the rest of the denizens because of having gone to bed with a heavier load, had been about the last to awaken.

No attention was paid to him, of course, and he made a bee line for the Hog Pen Saloon, shouting as he ran:

"I'll be right back, boys; be right back! Don't do nawthin' till I git thar', which will be as soon as I have wet my whistle so it will sound. Sorry to delay the proceedin's, but Happy Harkins ain't half happy till he's half corned, and he must begin early if he expects to reach that happy state before bedtime again."

And he was still shouting as the Hog Pen swallowed him.

"That bein' the case," Dan Buck meantime retorted, "we have conditions to offer, and we aire hyer to offer 'em. We have made up our minds that your prisoner is not Doc Dalton."

"The hurricanes, he ain't! What do you

pretend to know about it? Get out of here, or I will bore you through!"

"Bore away, boss, ef ye want to. We mean biz, and we is a big posse."

Welcher fairly turned purple in his rage, and raised the gun which he already had snatched from his belt and pulled the trigger.

He had taken a bead straight at Dan, who did not flinch, and it appeared that he had no need to, for there was merely a click as the hammer came down upon an empty chamber.

And no sooner had this been done than the entire posse before the hotel drew their guns and leveled them at their infuriate mayor and Buck invited him to hold up his hands. It looked as if they had come on an errand and had sent an advance messenger.

"What does this mean?" cried the mayor, palling.

"Et means that this hyer camp has riz in rebellion," answered Buck, "and that we aire some of the rebels."

"Curse you! I always took you for a traitor, Dan Buck! What is the meaning of this rebellion, as you call it? What do you expect to gain?"

"We want the release of Felix Fox."

"You won't get it! I'll call my true men around me and fight to the death before I will give in to you!"

"All right. Go ahead! But, meantime, you aire our prisoner of war, and we will take keer of you! See? Go fer him, boys, and make him secure, and we'll march on to the cooler."

Half a dozen of the men dashed forward, and as the mayor turned to run they laid hands upon him.

"It is rough, I allow," observed Buck, "but you would not offer terms nor take terms, so you have only yourself to blame. We have grown about tired of tyrant reign."

"Hillo! Hillo!" cried Happy Harkins, appearing at that moment and taking in the situation. "What do me eyes behold? Is et our worthy mayor in limbo? What in the name of a world of wonders meaneth et? Stop the procession, boyees, till I go and get my other eye open!"

But the procession did not stop.

"Harkins," called out the prisoner, "go and find Hank Riggle and tell him what is up, and tell him to come to the rescue, double quick. If war is what these cusses are after, war is what they shall have!"

"Just as you please about that," assured Dan Buck, calmly. "You will find that we have got the big end of the stick, and that you will have to come to whatever terms we have a mind to name. Come on with him, boys, to the lock-up, and we will salt him down. Hurrah fer the Reilleyites!"

They gave three cheers and a tiger, and it might have been inferred, to carry out the figure with which we began, that the Philistines had been met and overcome.

On toward the jail they marched, their prisoner under strong guard, but before they reached their destination they were brought to a halt by a striking personage with a brace of guns to the fore.

CHAPTER VIII.

TULIP TILLY.

"Hold hard on your wheelers here!" a cheery voice rang out. "What is the meaning of all this uproar this bright morning? The reason I ask is because I want to know, and if there is any fun on the docket I want to chip in. Behold!"

The personage was a jaunty young woman in male attire.

She had on a neat vest and coat, and a wide-brimmed hat rested prettily upon her wealth of hair.

She had peerless eyes, and the glint in their depths boded ill for the man who dared to disregard her injunction.

And it was not disregarded.

She seemed to take in everything at a glance, and any one experienced in reading faces would have read surprise in hers when she saw the prisoner.

"Hillo!" cried Buck. "Whar' did you come from, beauty?"

"Oh, from nowhere in particular. I have just struck your camp. Say, are you going to have a hanging-bee this morning?"

"No, I reckon not."

"Pshaw! That's too bad. I thought I was in for a little fun. What are you going to do with your prisoner there?"

"Put him in the lock-up."

"Well, I have no right to oppose you; didn't mean to do that anyhow—it is no funeral of mine."

"She lies!" cried the prisoner.

"Lies?"

"Yes. She is the gal that got away last night, or my name is not Ben Welcher!"

"You are off the trail this time, sure enough, old man! I have just arrived in your little one-horse city, you see," avowed the lovely Amazon.

"You lie like sin!"

"Say, gentlemen, just let him loose, will you, and let me take a fall out of him for that? It will relieve you of all concern in regard to him, and you will never miss him."

"What could you do with him, miss?"

"I'll show you. I will make him think the lightning has struck in his neighborhood somewhere."

"Yes, let me loose," seconded the prisoner, as he made an effort to free himself, "for this is the pard of Doc Dalton, and we must search her for the paper she has with her."

"You are talking through your hat, old fellow!" cried the girl sport. "I don't catch your twitter. If you mistake me for some one else, let me set you right. I am Tulip Tilly, the flyest girl in the whole woolly West, and in my little fling around the circle I have happened to drop in to see you."

"Where did you come from?" demanded Dan Buck.

"Oh, from over the hill and far away—it don't just matter where, I opine. But, go on with your show."

"I tell you, she is the same one," insisted the prisoner. "By the infernal! if you don't free me and let me fill my place as mayor of this camp you will live to repent it!"

"What would you do, chappie, if you got free?" asked the girl.

"I would show you what I would do, and that in mighty short order, you can bet on it!"

"Let him free then, for goodness' sake," the girl invited. "I would like no better fun than to take some of the conceit out of him. But who is this Doc Dalton he speaks of?"

"See her play it off?" cried Welcher. "Are you going to be fooled that way, boys?"

"We ain't fooled a whole lot," averred Buck, with a grin.

"What have we hyer? What have we hyer? Bless my twin eyes, what have we here, boyees?"

It was Happy Harkins, who, having lingered behind to take another drink, had just caught up with the procession, and looked the surprise he evidently felt on seeing the pretty sport.

"Say, don't you know her?" demanded Welcher.

"Know her?" repeated the bum. "D'ye think I have an acquaintance wi' angels?"

Do I look as if I had the entrance to the upper realms? No, I don't know her; but, by cracky, I will take a drink at her expense, if she will just say the magic word, for it is 'most a minute since I imbibed!"

"Shut up!" roared the prisoner. "Isn't she the gal that was with the man that we arrested last night?"

"Sartain not!" declared the bum, promptly. "That one was in petticoats, while this hyer one is in pants. See? I tell ye, boys, ye aire entertaining an angel unawares, if ye don't reckynize her as sech!"

"You are all fools!" roared the mayor. "Let me go, and see how mighty soon I will straighten things out! Let me go, I say! By Harry! but you shall all pay for this! I swear you shall!"

"Why, he is rather wrathly, isn't he?" remarked the girl sport. "Better take him on to the refrigerator, I should say, and if you want any more help than you have got I will lend a hand myself. I am ripe for anything that offers. Think I will go with you anyhow."

"Forward!" ordered Buck. "We don't want to monkey away time here in this fashion. You are welcome to come along if you want to, Tulip Tilly."

"Thank you! I am right with you!"

"Me too! Me too!" cried out the bum. "I was on the p'int of rushin' back for another dose of p'izen to stay my stum-mick, but I guess I kin stand it till we all go back if ye don't stay too long."

"Oh, I'm happy as a clam
When I am full kerslam
Of the juice of ye gay and festive
Bug, bug, bug,
And Happy is my name,
You would know it just the same,
By the hanny look upon my pretty
Mug, mug, mug."

That, and several verses equally as bad, if not indeed worse, he sang as they proceeded to the lock-up of the camp, to the great amusement of the members of the crowd who cared for that sort of thing, and when they reached their destination he wound up with:

"I won't pass the hat now, boyees, but I'll drink to your good health when we get back—at your expense. Now, Dan, what is on the carpet?"

The mayor had, by this time, worked himself into such a passion that he was almost frothing at the mouth.

"Why, we are going to give this other prisoner his trial," answered Bob, to the bum's inquiry.

Information which caused the mayor to rave and storm the more. He was wild to get free and take the case into his own hands, threatening calamities the most dire if he was not released.

"Et's no use, mayor," protested Buck.

"This hyer little rebellion has been a good while hatchin', and now you see the chick that has popped out of the shell. It is all your own fault, and you have nobody to blame but yourself for it. Your trial will come next, I reckon."

"My trail! What do you mean?"

"Jest what I say. You will be tried fer murder, ef we know ourselves."

"Tried for murder?" and the mayor grew pale as he echoed the words. "I have done no murder, Dan Buck."

"You have done a dozen, right hyer in Reilley. You have shot many a poor cuss down in his tracks without givin' him the ghost of a chance; but now the tables have turned—turned clean over, and you are under 'em!"

"It's a lie! If I was the quicker on the draw, it was their fault. This is carrying a joke too far!" sputtered the prisoner.

"You will find it ain't no joke fore we get done with it."

"Where is Hank Riggle? I'll bet he will take a hand in this thing before it

is done with, and if there isn't a ruction here at Reilley it will be a wonder! I'll hang every mother's son of you as soon as I get free!"

"Your will is good enough, no doubt, but ye ain't free yet, and we aire goin' to take mighty good care that you don't get free, either. Do you observe? We are the rebellion I spoke about when I first called you up, and I guess we can carry it to a finish."

By this time the calaboose had been opened and the mayor, having been securely bound, was thrust within, while Deadwood Dick was brought forth into the morning air and sunshine.

At sight of him the whole posse of rebels gave a cheer, as if they knew the man and were eager to hail him chief.

He was freed at once, and they escorted him to the Shanty Palace, where they gave him ample time to make his toilet and breakfast.

CHAPTER IX.

A SCRIMMAGE IN PROSPECT.

Felix Fox had come forth smiling.

He was stiff and sore, and felt wretched, but he had tried to let none of this be seen in its reality.

It had been a disappointment to many that he and Tulip Tilly did not recognize each other when their eyes met, for it had been the general supposition that she was none other than his pard of the night before.

She, too, had gone to the hotel, however, had registered there by the name she had given, and had taken a room.

There had come a lull in the excitement, and it seemed as if the camp had lost some of its population, for not many men were observed on the streets.

Hank Riggle had not been seen; whereupon Dan Buck remarked to his men that there was mischief on the air of some kind. He felt it in his bones, he declared, and it was to be looked out for, for Hank was the ugliest man in town when aroused, as everybody knew—the mayor's right-hand man, in fact.

Meantime, the rebels had taken charge of the mayor's office.

"Who is going to be made mayor?" Happy Harkins was demanding. "That is what I want to know? I want to drink his good health jest as soon as he is in, and at his expense. Hence I want to know."

"Oh! give us a mayor that's fair an' square,
And about as broad as he's long,
And we'll drink to his health,
To his limit o' wealth;
And that is the sing of my song."

Silliness that brought a laugh from the idlers around, of course.

"The thought of it makes my mouth water," the bum declared. "I can't wait, but must go and indulge once more. Don't let anything important occur till I git back again, Dan, for I don't want to miss any of the show."

He disappeared into the bar-room of the Shanty Palace, and about the time he did so Felix Fox stepped out upon the piazza.

He looked like a new man, almost, and he certainly felt like one.

"Well, gentlemen, here is your prisoner," he said. "I have kept my parole, you observe, and am ready for the trial you promised me. I am willing to place myself in your hands for that purpose at once."

"And we are ready to give you the trial," asserted Dan Buck. "This hyer crowd is your jury, if you don't object."

"That suits me, sir."

"And we'll proceed to try you just where you stand. I'll take it upon my own shoulders to be judge, since this hyer

camp is under rebel rule now, and I am the chief of the rebel host, so ter say."

"It is all the same to me, sir," assured the all-around sport. "All I ask is a fair hearing and a just verdict."

"You will get et, don't doubt. Now, who is ther first witness?"

No one responded.

"I think you have got him in jail, in the person of the mayor," suggested Felix Fox. "You will have to bring him out, I guess, if it is necessary to have him here."

"Et ain't necessary," declared Dan. "Is thar' ary galoot hyer that says this man is Doc Dalton, same as Ben Welcher declared him ter be?" he asked, raising his voice so as to make himself heard by all.

No one spoke up in the affirmative.

"Don't be afraid ter speak out," Dan added, "fer et ain't Ben Welcher that is askin', and ye needn't fear a bullet. We can't have a trial onless thar' is some one to accuse the prisoner of the charge. Speak right up, if thar' is any one that thinks the same as the mayor."

But it appeared no one thought as the mayor did on that point.

"Well, friend prisoner," said Dan, after waiting a few moments, "et seems that nobody is goin' to make the charge. What have you to say for yourself. You know the charge our mayor made against you."

"Your mayor was mistaken, sir," declared Mr. Fox. "I am not the person he took me to be. I have been unjustly imprisoned, and my pard of last night has been separated from me. Naturally, I have no feeling of profound love for your mayor. I am Felix Fox, a sport at large."

"And I reckon thar' is no proof to ther contrary," added Dan, "and now I give your case over to the jury. What is your verdict, boys?"

"Let him go free!" was the shout.

"Free it is!" agreed Dan. "Stranger, you aire free to go and come at will, and I'll see to it that your guns aire handed back to you as soon as I kin find the man what's got 'em."

"Greatly obliged to you, boys!" said the sport-at-large. "If there is anything I can do in return, just say so."

"Mebby thar' is," spoke up Dan. "We want a new mayor."

"You would not suggest my taking that office, would you? If so, I must decline. I am a stranger among you, and I must prove myself before anything of that sort is thought of."

At that moment Happy Harkins reappeared.

"Whar' is the new mayor?" he demanded. "Who is he? I want to make his acquaintance as soon as possible. Is it you, my good friend of last night, who made me happier than I had been in many a long, long day?"

"No, it is not I," avowed the sport.

"Worse luck, worse luck! You would fill the office with credit to yourself and honor to your supporters, I don't doubt a bit, and no doubt with benefit to me, for methinks I recognize in you a good Samaritan. I had rather drink to your health than any one else's that I know of, unless the other fellow speaks first."

"Let up and shut up!" ordered Buck. "You are putting nails in your coffin hourly."

To which Happy sang:

"I long for enough
Of the ever good stuff;
If you can't find a glass
Bring a pail;
Though each drink I take
Be considered to make
For use of my coffin
A nail."

"Fill the bowl of good cheer,
And don't deem it queer
If I drain it off quick
While it's good;
And don't be surprised,
When at last I'm capsized,
To find a coffin all iron
And no wood."

The crowd shouted for more of the song, but Happy merely shook his head.

"You are a genius at song-making, my friend," decided the sport.

"And a fiend at rum drinking," averred Dan Buck. "But, Happy, you make a nuisance of yourself by chipping in where you are not wanted. Keep your mouth shut now for five minutes and—"

"Great 'ructions!" cried the bum, in pretended terror. "Make it one minute, won't you? I could never stand it five without a drink!"

They gave him no further notice.

At that moment the girl sport, Tulip Tilly, came running up.

"Get on your war-paint, boys!" she cried. "There is another army marching up the gulch!"

"The deuce you say!" exclaimed Dan. "Which way? How many?"

"That way!" indicating, "and half a hundred strong."

"Then it is Riggle, with Welcher's gang."

"That means a scrimmage, I take it," spoke up the sport-at-large.

"Well, that is jest what et do, I opine," agreed Dan. "You had better get inside if you don't want to get hurt."

"Do you mean to insult me?" demanded Mr. Fox. "You have used me well, and now if I can do any favor for you in return I am here to do it. I think we can make it hot for these fellows."

"You mean to take a hand in et?"

"I will take command, if you say so."

"By hokey, if you will do that I will be your second, and we will give 'em p'ticular fits!—Hail Columbia on both sides of the drum!"

"And you don't want to count me out of it," spoke up Tulip Tilly, as cool as if it had been a mere invitation to a dance. "I am good for one or two of them, in a ruction."

"Are you not afraid, lady?" asked Felix, the sport.

"No, sir! not a bit! I am only anxious to help these men to clean their camp, for I realize that it needs it badly. Wolves and hyenas are out of place here!" she asserted.

"S—s—say, miss," spoke up Happy Harkins, falteringly. "I hope that you ain't one o' them 'ar' temperance shemales, what would pour out all the good likker in the camp, aire ye?"

Another laugh started, but it was cut short, for, with a whoop, Hank Riggle and his men came tearing up the gulch, firing as they came.

CHAPTER X.

MAKING A MAYOR.

Some one had just brought Felix Fox's weapons.

He leaped down from the piazza, his guns in hand, and took command of the rebels.

Dan Buck gave way to him at once, and Tulip Tilly placed herself beside Dan in order to make herself useful to the new commander, and take a hand in the scrimmage that seemed imminent.

The sport divided his force with prompt action, and gave Dan an order respecting one half.

That order was at once undertaken.

Fox himself led the other half, in another direction, Tulip Tilly going with

him, and in less than a minute the street was deserted.

On came the opposing crowd, yelling like wolves and hyenas, and they thought they had cleared the street by their appearance, forcing the rebels to seek shelter to save their lives.

They kept on shooting as they came, to add to the terror which they already had created—as they believed.

The very worst element of the whole camp was in the band.

Past the Hog Pen Saloon they dashed, and on to the Shanty Palace, but when they were only halfway between the two they met with a surprise.

From the rear came the challenge:

"Hands up, every dog of you, or we'll fill you so full of lead you can't wiggle!"

They turned in dismay, to find there the prisoner of the night before, Felix Fox, as he had called himself, with a dozen men, covering them with their guns, while at the same time they were hemmed in on either side.

On one side came Tulip Tilly, with her men, and on the other was Dan Buck and his.

"Put them right up, my daisies!" cried the girl sport. "If you don't there will be trouble here, and you will be right in the middle of it, you bet! We mean grim old business, every time, and you can bet on that, too! We have got you where it will hurt if you resist!"

"Drop them 'ar' guns!" ordered Dan, at about the same time. "If you don't we will let drive at you, and thar' will be weepin' and wailin' and gnashin' of teeth till you will think the gates o' Parrydise have been closed and you left out in ther howlin' wilderness! This hyer rebellion is in dead earnest, and the sooner you give up or come over to our side, the better fer yer health!"

Some of them dropped their guns, others declared their willingness to join the insurgents, while others ran away as fast as their legs could carry them, and among the latter was Hank Riggle.

"He! ha! haw!" laughed Happy Harkins, as he slapped his knee; "ef that wasn't about the neatest thing I ever seen. I'll take a drink on that; who will say treat?"

"Well, that is the first round, anyhow, and a bloodless victory," observed Felix Fox, with a cheery laugh.

"And thanks to you for it," said Dan Buck.

"Well, not altogether, for I was not alone in it. Now, how many of these fellows can you trust, Buck?"

It did not take long for Dan to decide.

Those who chose were allowed to join the rebels, while the others were disarmed and allowed to go with a warning not to appear again.

They went, but were not pledged to keep their parole, since their word in that respect would not have been considered good for anything, anyhow, but they had been deprived of just so many weapons.

About that time a new-comer appeared upon the scene—a person of good appearance, well dressed, and looking like a keen business man.

"How are you, Mr. Harding" greeted Dan Buck. "Did you see the way we done that little trick?"

"Yes, and you did it well; but what does all this mean?"

"It means that this is a rebellion; that we have got tired of Ben Welcher and have made up our minds to make a change hyer, and we want you to fill the place of mayor of this hyer camp, Mr. Harding."

"Where is Welcher?"

"In the cooler."

"The mischief! Well, this is news! I thought you were his right bower, Dan?"

"Mebby I was, but I am on the side of law and order now; we have had too much of the other sort of thing lately."

"I am glad for the prospect of a change. But what started the ball to rolling? Hasn't this thing cropped out all of a sudden? What was the thing that forced it?"

"It has been thought of for some time, sir, and last night when this stranger kem near almost gettin' murdered by that hot-tempered galoot, we thought et was about time to put on the screws. And that 'minds me to interdoose him; Mr. Felix Fox, let me interdoose ye to Samuel Harding, manager of the Blue Wasp."

This, then, was the man Dick had been asked to call upon.

"Glad to know you, sir," assured the manager, extending his hand. "Glad that you escaped the fate intended for you, according to this man's story."

"I have him to thank for it, sir."

"Well, he was too modest to tell me that part of it, I suppose. Who is the lady?"

"As I have no one to introduce me I will introduce myself," spoke up the girl sport, promptly. "I am Tulip Tilly, the flyest chick of the flock, and able to take care of Number One any time."

"You remind me more of a bright daisy," said the manager, gallantly.

"Thank you, sir!" with a smile.

The manager, a young man, not more than thirty-one or two, cast a searching look at the girl as she turned away.

Just then came a yell from the direction of the jail, where a guard had been left to look after the prisoner. In an instant every thought was for him.

"By Harry! I believe Welcher has got out!" cried Dan.

"It sounds like it; now there will be fun in earnest, I expect," assumed the sport.

"You can safely set it down that there will be," agreed the mine manager. "Welcher holds a wonderful influence over the men of this camp, and can bend them to his will."

"He won't bend us!" cried one of the rebel band.

"That is right, boys," encouraged the s' anger sport. "If you are tired of his rule, just stand together, shoulder to shoulder, and we can dump his little throne for him."

"All we ask is for you to lead us," cried another. "If you do that we are sure to win. And we'll 'bey you, right to the letter, you can bet on that part of et!"

"All right, if the others are willing. What say, Mr. Buck? And you, Mr. Harding?"

"Do it, certainly!"

"But about your bein' our mayor, Mr. Harding?" urged Buck. "Will you do that?"

"Yes, if it is desired."

"Then consider yourself in office! Boys, three cheers for Mayor Harding!"

They were given with a will; but no sooner had they died away than the shouting in the direction of the jail ceased and there came a noise like the pounding upon a door.

"Boys, I believe they haven't got him yet, at all! Forward, double-quick, and maybe we can yet secure him. If we do, we will defy them to take him out, for we can camp around the jail!" were the sport's words.

And off they went in haste, yet with something of order, for not a few of the men had done military duty, and all had seen more or less of such service, so there

was something military about their movements.

When they came in sight of the jail, however, the door had just been broken down and Ben Welcher leaped out, his hands still bound. One of his friends made haste to cut his bonds and put a weapon in his hand; then the man was a tiger unloosed.

Many of them had seen Welcher in a passion, but none of them had ever seen him in such a rage as now. He was like an infuriated wild animal, and bidding his men follow, he rushed upon the band of rebels as if he alone and single-handed had the prowess to "do them up."

CHAPTER XI.

TAKING A PRISONER.

"Too late for our plan!" observed the sport commander, calmly.

"But not too late for a ruction," added Dan Buck. "Look at that rip-roarin' cyclone, will ye?"

"I will take some of that out of him if you will leave it to me," said the leader, in his quiet fashion. "He is too excited to shoot straight, so we need not fear his first fire."

"But he may hit one of us by accident."

"If he does not shoot before he comes a little nearer I will forestall that," the sport promised.

Felix Fox stood calmly waiting, while the deposed mayor and his followers made a mad rush forward. As they advanced, Welcher shouted for his followers and friends to come again to his support.

And, as might be imagined, men did come sneaking out of places where they had been in hiding, and fell in with him, and in a few brief moments his band had been swelled until he had a force even superior to that of the insurgents, whereat some of their faces blanched.

"Stand firm," ordered the sport, cool as ice. "You know them for cowards by what you have seen. Their leader is the only brave man of the lot, and his is only born of the rage he is in. Don't be afraid, for we can whip them out of their boots if it comes to the fight. By the way, Mr. Harding, any place in your camp where weapons and ammunition are sold?"

"Yes."

"Go and buy up the lot right away. That will weaken them, in time, even if not immediately."

"I'll do it. Never thought of that!"

So the new mayor went off immediately to secure the stock.

Meantime, the mayor-that-was was near enough to be called to a halt, and was challenged by the sport leader of the rebels.

"Hold up there!" he shouted. "Put on brakes! If you don't, I'll spatter your gore all over the surrounding territory and fit you for planting."

The response was a mad bellow and—a shot.

The shot was wild, but near enough not to be pleasant, and Fox jerked his gun up to the level and returned the compliment.

Instantly the bellow was changed into a yell of pain, as Welcher's right arm dropped helpless to his side, while the revolver fell out of his grasp and dropped upon the ground.

"Curse you for that!" the man screamed. "You shall suffer for it or I am a liar."

"Your own fault," shouted the sport. "If you had come to a halt, and had not fired at me, you would not have got it."

You have only yourself to blame, so do not squeal."

The whole crowd had come to a halt.

"Charge them!" Welcher shouted. "Wipe them off the face of the earth! I shall not rest until I see that fellow burned alive at the stake!"

"You will never rest if you wait for that," averred the other. "And your men had better go slow about making a charge in this direction; we give them fair warning. We are prepared to offer you terms, if you want to hear them; if not we shall just shoot to kill."

The sport had motioned his men to draw up in line, and they had done so—making a double file clear across the street, and their weapons looked at the other party threateningly.

The assailants stood huddled in a bunch, undecided what to do. They were afraid to obey their passionate leader, and yet, on the other hand, they had been so long under his rule that they hardly knew how to disobey.

"To Hades with your terms!" yelled Welcher. "You will be begging terms before another hour rolls by. See if you are not! Charge them, men! Don't you hear my order? Who is mayor of this camp, I would like to know? Are these scoundrels going to turn us out?"

"Come right along" invited Happy Harkins. "Come right up an' git your medicine, and then we'll go and take a drink!"

But they did not come, and Welcher could not prevail upon them to advance another inch!

"When you get tired of that I will talk with you," called out the sport.

"Curse you! what do you want to say?"

"To offer you these terms. We will let you down easy if you surrender and resume your place in the jail and await your trial."

"Never! By the Lord Harry, never! You have got the drop this time, but we will meet again and then we'll see who will hold the best hand. Curse you! you have ruined me for life!"

"Blame yourself."

"Well, there will be a settling of accounts between us mighty soon."

"Settle it now, if you say so. But, what are you going to do, since you refuse the terms?"

"I'll retreat for the present, but you will hear from us again as soon as I get this arm fixed up a bit. You will find that Ben Welcher is the worst snag you ever ran up against in your life."

"That is your proposition, is it? Now hear ours: You will walk right over here and surrender, or we will open fire on you and your men. Take your choice. We will give you medical attendance, and make you as comfortable as a prisoner can be made under the circumstances."

Pale before, Welcher turned even more pale on hearing this threat.

"And I will give you just thirty seconds in which to make up your mind, and not a second more," was added. "Men, take aim! Each one sight a man!"

That long double line of revolvers came up to a higher level, and eyes squinted along the tubes. Ben Welcher was not the only pale man they covered, either, for all were white to the lips.

The mayor-that-was was seen to fairly grate his teeth in rage.

He turned and spoke to Riggle, and Riggle nodded.

"Hurry up!" the sport warned.

"Well, you have got me, and I cave," confessed Welcher.

He stepped forward, and as he did so Riggle gave a signal and turned and ran with the men at his heels.

It had been the sport's intention to disarm them as soon as he got hold of Welcher. He had not thought of their skedaddling, but he let it pass, and did not allow his men either to shoot or to pursue.

"Well, your escape did not do you much good," he observed, when Welcher came up.

"There will be another round before this thing is settled," growled the prisoner in vicious mood.

"I am ready to take one now, if you will only say the word," spoke up Happy Harkins. "I'm mighty dry."

"You go to sulphur!" was the retort.

But Happy sang:

"There is a happy land, far, far away,
Where prime old whisky flows, free every day!
Oh, how I long to see
That land that is awaiting me!
Oh, how happy I shall be
When I'm thar' to stay!"

The rough element of the crowd laughed, but the others gave little or no attention, being busy with the prisoner, and Happy went off to the Hog Pen to take a dose that would hurry on his departure for the land awaiting all who worship at whisky's altar.

"What are you going to do with your prisoner, sir?" asked Tulip Tilly.

"Why do you ask that?" was inquired.

"Because I think he expects to be put back in jail, and has it planned that he will be rescued again."

"I have thought of that, so I shall propose to Mr. Harding to have him imprisoned in some part of the Blue Wasp where it will be impossible for the ruffian's followers to reach him."

"Curse you! You will not do that?" the discredited mayor cried.

"Why not?" asked the sport. "It will repay you for the way you jumped me last night, and more—it will make the camp safe from your ugly presence."

"That is just what we will do with him," asserted Harding, at that moment coming up. "He will not be safe at the jail, but he cannot get away from us at the mine, I assure you."

"To the mine with him," urged Dan Buck. "We are likely to have more trouble with these cusses, and we want to have our hands free to give 'em particular fits the next time! There is going to be more of a ruction here at Reilley before this muss is settled, I'm thinking!"

CHAPTER XII.

HARDING RECITES HISTORY.

So away to the mine he was rushed.

Meantime, the doctor of the camp had been sent for to see to his arm.

A strong stockade fence had been built around the mine property, in the expectancy of an attack sooner or later, and in this were a pair of heavy gates, which could be closed and effectively barred, while in fence and gates alike were loopholes for defense.

As they entered with their prisoner, the gates were closed after them, and Welcher was placed in an unused tunnel with a guard to watch over him.

The sport then went with the manager to his office.

"Well, Mr. Harding," he said, "I understand that I owe my release from limbo to you. Accept my thanks."

"In a measure, yes. That is all right, though."

"And it has been hinted that you want to see me. If there is anything that I can do for you—"

"There is much you can do for me, sir. You are Richard Bristol—Deadwood Dick, Junior, if I do not greatly mistake, and you came here in response to the call of one Jim Trivet."

"You have it straight. I am the person sent for by Trivet."

"I was sure on that point. Now, Trivet has left it for me to state his case for him."

"All right, if he prefers it that way. He stated that he has suffered a great wrong, and that he has been cheated out of his own."

"Right, to a certain extent. Let me give you a little history; then you will know just where to begin operations."

"Fire away!"

The manager had handed out some cigars, and both lay back in their chairs to enjoy a smoke while they chatted.

"Quite a number of years ago," the manager began, "two prospectors, Job Welcher and Thomas Dalton, discovered this mine and claimed it in partnership. They had made a rich find, but could not work it to their satisfaction, owing to trouble with Arrapahoes and Pawnees."

"I have heard something of this from Welcher," said Dick.

"You will now hear the truth about it from me, Mr. Bristol. He no doubt added that the mine was now in full blast, and paying big returns to the rascals who pretend to own it. No matter. I am the chief of the rascals in question, and I expect and intend to hold the mine against all comers at any cost. Well, the original owners had to abandon the claim, but they did it only as a temporary matter. They converted their crude gold into money, buried that, and got out. They had made a map of the place, which they sent to their sons at home, a half of it to each."

"Welcher's son's name was Ben, and Dalton's was Murdoc, generally called Doc for short. With the map came a letter to each, saying that if the fathers did not return the boys could set it down as final that they had gone under at the hand of the Indians, and they were told to set out together, when it became safe to do so, and recover the box of money and regain possession of the mine. You see, the original papers concerning the mine are in that box; but, if I can hold possession here about a week longer, the mine will be my own under the time allowance. If I lose possession for a single hour, meantime, I shall have to spend that whole time over again to get the same footing."

"I see."

"On the other hand, if I can find that box of dust and the papers, I can claim it by that. If Jim Trivet gets it first, he will claim it. But if Ben Welcher gets the papers during this week, then good-bye to all our hopes! There you have the whole thing in a nutshell."

"But it is not altogether clear to me."

"What part is misty?"

"Have you any right whatever to the property? And are not both you and Trivet trying to cheat Welcher, even if he is no angel? It is enough to make him show his spurs, if anything would."

"Why, one week more, and the mine is my own! Would you expect me to give it up?"

"Not unless forced to do so."

"And then I shall have a legal right to it."

"But not a moral right. What about Trivet, meantime?"

"If he gets the papers, it will go to him, and I'll be out."

"And how can he claim it under the papers?"

"By swearing that he is Welcher, and by proving it, if he can, against such proof as the other fellow would show up."

"It looks as if you and Trivet are working together."

"Well, we are."

"Then I cannot be of use to you, that I can see. I do not enter into a game of

this kind save on the side of right, and you appear to be in the wrong."

"Appear to be, I admit it, in the face of Welcher's story."

"Ha! What now?"

"I have more to tell you."

"Let me hear the whole matter, then."

"The sons did set out to find the hidden box of money and claim the mine. When they got out here in this country Doc Dalton made friends with a fellow named Paul Gibbs, and they laid together a scheme to murder Welcher, take his part of the map, and share the proceeds."

"The villains!"

"That does not do them half justice. They carried out their plan, as far as their intention went. They shoved Welcher into a horrible gorge, and left him there, after robbing him, having no thought but that he had been killed instantly on striking the bottom. But they were mistaken. A big tree down there, with branches as soft as a woman's arms almost, caught him, and when he came to his senses there he was!"

"I will not trouble you with the story of his suffering. He got out and came here, and here he is to-day as Jim Trivet! But he has no proof that he is the rightful owner of this mine—not a scrap of proof! Meantime, Gibbs had tried to rob Dalton of his half of the paper to claim it all for himself, and they had a rupture in consequence. Gibbs was a thorough scoundrel at heart—no need to tell you that, but I mean that he was little short of an outlaw, and he had a big following of rascals like himself. He came here eventually to scoop the mine, but found me in possession, and I have so far managed to keep him out."

"It appears to be something of a tangle. I don't know whether I understand it clearly and fully or not."

"You will when I have done. There is no question but that the fellow we have here a prisoner under the name of Ben Welcher is really Paul Gibbs—in fact, I can swear that he is, and will so swear. And there is no question either about his still holding half of the paper that will show the hiding-place of the box of money. He has been on the watch for Dalton to appear to find the box, and when you came last night he jumped you at once! As the time has grown short, he has, of course, been more than eager to get that box and the papers it contains."

"You may be right."

"Where Dalton is is a mystery. Perhaps he is dead. I am of the opinion not, however. I think he is working as sly a game as Gibbs, in order to get possession of both papers, and I want to defeat them both and get them myself if I can. That is what I wanted to see you about, sir."

"Then you yourself are really a robber, and would steal the mine away from Trivet, since you have acknowledged him to be the rightful owner."

"Ha, ha! Do you not see the fine point?"

"I am afraid not, sir."

"Trivet and I are one and the same man!"

It flashed upon Dick in an instant then, and he recalled all that Dan had said respecting the habits of Harding.

"Your disguise is perfect, sir," Dick declared. "I would not have guessed it without some clew fell into my hands to turn my suspicion in that direction sooner or later."

"Yes, I have tried to make it perfect, and it has answered its purpose. As Jim Trivet there was little danger that Gibbs would molest me, if I took care to avoid him, but had he known that Harding was really Welcher, then he would have murdered me without a thought!"

"And if he had suspected you as Trivet, or that Trivet was Welcher?"

"He could have defied him, you see. And, if pressed, Trivet could disappear, and that would leave me still in possession, and all I would have to do would be to hold the mine against all comers until the time limit was up."

"Then, really, you had two chances for it."

"Yes."

"You could claim it that way, or, if Trivet got the papers, he could claim it and oust you, and still it would be you yourself!"

"Just so. And in the mean time I was rolling up wealth out of it, and needed only a little more proof to make me secure in my possession. That is the work I expect of you."

CHAPTER XIII.

WHICH MAN LIED?

Deadwood Dick was much interested. It was as strange a story as he had listened to in many a day.

And, even as he took it all in, and weighed the evidence, there was still room for doubt.

Was this man really the Welcher who rightfully owned the Blue Wasp? Was he really Jim Trivet? It did not seem possible that he could have assumed a double personage and carried it on so long.

He expressed nothing of these thoughts, however, but he did make up his mind to learn more about Trivet.

What if he had disappeared? There was only the bare word of Harding that he and Trivet had been one and the same, and that now he was the real Welcher to whom the mine belonged.

There was room for doubt, certainly.

"Well, I will undertake the work," decided Dick, after thinking a moment. "In doing it I may need your help in your guise as Trivet."

"In which case you shall have it, most assuredly, to any extent."

So readily and so heartily spoken that it removed some of the doubts which had been gathering in the wary detective's mind.

"I would like to ask a few questions, sir, for information on special points."

"Ask them, and they shall be answered."

"Do you really not know where Dalton is?"

"I do not, as I have told you. Where he is is a mystery. I am of the opinion that he is alive, however."

"Why do you so think?"

"Well, chiefly because Gibbs thinks he is."

"Do I look anything like the man?"

"Well, yes, there is a resemblance."

"But could you make the mistake of taking me for him?"

"Hardly."

"Do you think that Gibbs really believed me to be the man?"

"I should say there is no doubt about that."

"Do you think that he is now aware that he made such a mistake?"

"That is not easy to determine. He is a close fellow, and you never know what he thinks or what he is going to do until he acts."

"And you think that he still holds one-half of that map?"

"That is pretty certain. It seems to me."

"And he still thinks that Dalton holds the other half yet, you infer?"

"Yes; that is my inference."

"Well, if Dalton is alive, what would he naturally desire to do?"

"One of two things. He would either seek partnership with Gibbs again, or

would try to beat Gibbs by getting the half of the paper that is in his possession."

"And which the more likely?"

"The latter."

"So I think, too," avowed Dick. "And, that being the case, is it not possible that he is already here in this camp, working to that end?"

"It is not impossible, I should say."

"You speak as if you consider it not very probable, however."

"I would know him, I believe, if he were here, and so would Gibbs, at sight. I think it is improbable, therefore, that he is in Reitley."

"And yet look at your own case, how you have led a double life here and have fooled them all! What about that fellow, Hank Riggle? Do you think that he can possibly be Dalton?"

"No, not at all. That is impossible."

"Well, what more have you to tell me which may be of use to me?"

"That is about all, except to advise with you in regard to what should be done first of all. Shall we give our attention to holding the mine only, or try to find the box of money?"

"Both, I should say, but the former is the more important now, of course. Keep possession at all hazards."

"So I think, too, and I shall bend all my energies to hold my grip on the mine. If I can find the paper besides, well and good, but let us take no risk of the former for the sake of the latter."

"That is horse sense undoubtedly."

"That was my idea. But what if that paper turns up in Welcher's possession and he claims the mine?"

"We will let him prove it, that is all. If he is the false claimant we think him to be he will stumble and spill himself before he gets through with it, I don't doubt a bit. What do you say to paying Gibbs a visit?"

"What for?"

"I will demand the paper."

"He will only laugh you a defiance in return."

"Then I will call him Gibbs and we will see how he will take that."

"Ha! That is an idea I had not thought of. We will see how he will take it, as you say."

The manager threw away his finished cigar and rose to his feet, Dick following his example, and the manager led the way out and in the direction of the place where the prisoner was held.

They entered the tunnel together.

The doctor had been there, and had made the wounded arm as comfortable as possible.

"Well, how do you feel?" asked Felix Fox.

"Curse your impudence for asking!" was the ugly retort.

"I have come to see you on a matter of business of importance."

"You will have business of importance to attend to before this day is done, see if you don't, you interloper!"

"I want the half of a certain map you hold."

"Ha! you would rob me? After I told you my story you have joined hands with these robbers, and now mean to add injury to injury anew!"

"No, I am seeking rather to do justice to those whom you have wronged, Paul Gibbs."

"What's that you call me? My name is Ben Welcher."

"I have good reason to think otherwise. You are Paul Gibbs, who murdered Ben Welcher, and now wear his name. You need not deny it, for we've got a pretty clear line of evidence against you."

"But, by Judas! I do deny it! It's ab-

surd! Somebody has been telling you an infernal lie!"

"Then you contend that you are the real and true Welcher?"

"I swear that I am!"

"Tell me, then, how you escaped from that deep, dark gorge into which you were hurled by your partner and his friend?"

"I was never thrown over any ledge into the gorge. I was robbed only, and the robbers skipped out and left me. But I got here on the ground first, and I have held my own till now."

"Can you prove that you are Welcher?"

"If you can prove that you are not Dalton, curse you!"

"I can do that very readily."

"How? Tell me that."

"By proving who I really am, where I came from, and what brought me here."

"Bah! The fact that you are after my paper is proof against you being anybody else than Dalton!"

The manager started to say something, but Dick checked him, and they left the tunnel, ordering the watchman to guard the prisoner well.

"What do you think?" asked Harding.

"Hard to tell what to think. He can almost make one believe that he is telling the truth."

"He is a good one, no mistake. But he lies—lies like sin! I wish we had the real Dalton here and could bring them face to face and let them have it out while we listened."

"That would be a capital idea; but you have heard of that excellent way to cook a rabbit?"

"I presume so. First catch your rabbit, and so forth."

"That is it. We should first have to catch Mr. Dalton, and that will be the most difficult part of it all, or I miss my guess. But, hello! what is the excitement out there? Something is going on."

CHAPTER XIV.

DESPERATE DEALING.

Dick pointed to the gates as he spoke.

The men within the stockade were running to the fence to look out.

"What is going on?" called out Harding. "What is the matter outside there, boys?"

"Hank Riggle is making a charge up here. He is coming with all the force that was left in the camp, and will be here in half a minute. How about opening on 'em?"

"No; reserve your fire!" directed Deadwood Dick. "Let me have a talk with them first to see just what is in the wind."

He and the manager ran forward.

Dick looked around as he ran, as if in search of some one.

"Has any one seen that girl sport who came here with us?" he asked. "What has become of her?"

"She went out," one man answered: "she followed Dan Buck."

"Has Dan gone out?" cried the manager. "What does that mean?"

"Give it up. He went sort of on the sly and the gal sport sort of slyed et after him—weazel after the badger you see."

The manager looked to Dick for explanation.

"What do you make of this?" he asked, in a low tone. "Who was that girl, as you seem to have an interest in her. Do you know her?"

"She was my pard of last night," explained Dick, answering the last question first. "Something is up, and she has had a reason for following Buck; you can depend on that. She don't make mistakes in such cases."

"Do you think he has turned traitor?"

"Hard to tell."

"And she? What is her game?"

"Oh! she is as true as gold. She will be back again, all in good time, if no accident happens to her, which I fear may, in this wild town. I ought to go out in search of her, but I should only be shot down at sight by those ruffians."

"It would be suicide to try it, that I know."

"Unless in disguise, as one of them."

"Ah, yes; I forgot for the moment who you are."

And so had Dick himself, almost! He received a new idea like a revelation.

Why should he suspect anything crooked about Harding, for, knowing that he was Deadwood Dick, would he have shown his hand as he had if it had not been honest?

He thought not, unless it was a bluff, and if that, then it was about the biggest one on record, for it meant not only the risk of the mine, but perhaps his life as well, if he had killed Trivet.

They pressed on to the gates.

Outside they heard a yelling and hooting mob at a little distance.

Then was heard a roar of laughter, and a voice followed, singing:

"Hurrah! Hurrah! We'll sound the jubilee!
Hurrah! Hurrah! For whisky that is free!
So we'll sing the chorus, just as full as full
can be,
And you can bet that we won't go home till
morning!"

"Shut up, you drunken idiot!" cried the voice of Hank Riggle. "Give somebody else a show, will you?"

"Sartain, sartain! Have all the show you want, Hankey! Thar' will be a show fer everybody when that happy day arrives, I hope. We'll soak our skins so full that—"

"Shut up, or I will let some of the bad run out of you with a bullet! We have no time to listen to your nonsense. Hillo! inside thar'! We aire here with a flag o' truce, and we want to have a word with ye."

"That's so," said one of the men at the loopholes. "They are under a white rag, sure as you live."

"Well, what do you want?" shouted Harding.

"A talk with you."

"Well, talk away; I can hear you."

"Yes; but git up whar' ye kin be seen, so's we kin talk face to face."

"All right; I think I can afford to oblige you that far, my man; we are on the winning side, as you must admit."

"You aire on the inside, that is sartain."

Harding mounted to a rude platform built just inside the fence for just such a purpose.

He showed himself fearlessly, since he had no idea that the men would play any trick after coming under a flag of truce, and he demanded to know what was desired.

"We want our mayor sot free," was the demand.

"You can't have him," was the firm response. "I am acting mayor and he is a prisoner."

"Then you refuse to give him to us?"

"Yes, I do; positively refuse!"

"Then you will have to take the consequences, that is all. We aire goin' to burn the camp!"

"Don't! Fer the luv' ov goodness, don't!" cried the voice of Happy Harkins. "Think of the good stuff you will destroy! Fer the luv' ov goodness let me have time to roll out a bar'l before—"

"Shut up, or I will shut you up!" ordered Riggle, taking a bead on him with a gun.

"Good-by!" cried Happy, and he made a dash for camp.

"What do you say?" Riggle then demanded.

"Go ahead and burn it if you want to," Harding invited. "You will be doing yourselves more harm than you will do us."

"Yes, but what of the citizens in thar' with you? Boys," raising his voice still louder, "aire you goin' to back up this feller and see your homes laid in ashes? I should opine not!"

"Pay no heed to that," said Harding, looking around. "The Blue Wasp will pay for your losses if the ruffians carry out that threat."

"Hooray fer Harding!"

But immediately that was followed with a cry of surprise.

A rope was seen to whirl up over the manager's head, a loop settled around him, and the next instant he was jerked over the fence.

The yell that arose then was deafening, and the crowd beat a hasty retreat, dragging their prisoner after them on the ground by means of the rope that had given him into their hands.

Shots were fired, but in such haste that all went wide of the mark, and in a few seconds the crowd was out of pistol range.

"What is goin' to be done?" asked one of the mine men.

"We must charge them!" answered Dick. "Open the gates instantly."

Men set about this in haste, but it occupied some moments, and meanwhile the others were getting away.

The gates were open in a brief time, however, and out the men dashed, but suddenly Deadwood Dick turned and faced them, throwing up his arms as he did so as a signal for them to stop.

"It won't do, boys; it won't do!" he shouted.

"What won't do?"

"We must not all go; it may be a trick to capture the mines! Twenty of you, at least, must stay here and close the gates and hold the fort until we get back. The rest of you come on."

He turned and led the way down into the camp, fearless as a tiger, glancing back over his shoulder as he ran to see that his order was carried out.

And he saw that it was being done, about a score of the men having remained.

On they dashed after Dick's lead.

As they came to the camp and rounded into the street a sight met their eyes that chilled them.

In front of the Shanty Palace was a big tree, dead, with its gaunt limbs stretching out as if in dumb eloquence, and over one of those limbs the rope had been thrown.

At the other end of the rope was Harding, apparently half unconscious from the rough handling he had received, for some of the men had to support him.

A yell from Dick and his men caused the crowd to look their way.

"Stop!" Dick ordered. "If you pull on that rope we will riddle you!"

"Shoot an' be ripped!" was sent back. "You will hit your man ef ye do, and that will settle him!"

"Charge!" Dick cried. And he ran forward swiftly, the men with him, but before they had taken a dozen strides the rope was pulled and the new mayor of the camp was swinging in the air, and a dozen guns were aimed at him as he hung there.

"Hold up!" yelled Riggle. "Stop! or we will blaze away! We will trade even, your mayor for ours, but you will have to speak out lightning quick, you bet, or he will be a dead man before you get him!"

CHAPTER XV.

FALLING INTO A SNARE.

It was a thrilling moment.

This, then, had been their object, and they had played well their hand.

But they held a sword that was likely to cut either way if they did not handle it with extreme delicacy.

Deadwood Dick stopped short.

He was quick to see that it was the only chance for the man's life.

"Let him down!" he cried. "You will be his murderers in one minute if you keep him there."

"Will you trade?"

"Yes."

"Even?"

"Yes! Yes!"

It was a time when anything had to be promised.

But at that moment another party took a hand in the game; a report was heard and the rope was cut by a bullet.

The shot had come from the other side of the crowd, the side opposite to where Deadwood Dick and his men stood, and immediately from the same direction came a horse and rider.

All recognized the rider, for it was no other than Tulip Tilly, and in her hands she held a brace of guns, while the rein was thrown over her head and was hanging on her neck. She dashed forward with the speed of an arrow in its flight, shouting as she came:

"Back! you cowards! Out of my way, or I will give you a dose from which you will not recover in a hurry!"

And already Deadwood Dick was coming from the other side.

With a call to his men he had started immediately on seeing the man drop, for it was now or never.

But the others had had a lesson in warfare, and with unexpected quickness they formed themselves in a double line the same as they had seen Dick form his men a little while before.

"Stand off!" cried Riggle. "The worse for you if you don't! We are boss of the ring yet, you will find."

At that moment Tulip Tilly bounded in among them.

Harding was lying on the ground unconscious, and she leaned from the saddle and caught hold of his coat.

She had hardly stopped to do this, and with a word to her horse was off again, holding fast to the rescued man, whose heels dragged along on the ground as the horse ran.

It was such a surprise to the rascals that they forgot to act until it was too late.

When they thought to fire, horse and rider disappeared.

Tulip Tilly had turned short around a corner of the Shanty Palace, and the bullets that flew in that direction sped harmlessly by.

Deadwood Dick and his men sent up a rousing cheer, and the others having turned to look in the direction the girl had taken, Dick improved the opportunity and poured a volley into their ranks, which had the effect to throw them into disorder.

And following up that, he made a charge, and as a result the rascals broke and scattered in every direction.

"Saved! Saved!" cried a voice. And at the door of the Hog Pen appeared Happy Harkins, with a quart bottle in hand. "Thank Heavens! saved! And I have saved this!"

"What is saved?" some fellow asked. "The country!" cried Happy. "That is to say, the supply of whisky on hand, which amounts to the same thing."

And then he took a long pull at the bottle, after which he sang:

"Oh! I'm happy as a clam," etc.

"Well, back to the mine," ordered Dick. "We may be needed there before we know it, for I believe these fellows are deeper than we gave them credit for in the first place."

He led the way, and when they came in sight of the mine stockade they were just in time to see Tulip Tilly enter with the man she had rescued.

They hastened up the slope, and were soon within the grounds.

Dick hurried to where Harding was lying on the ground, with the doctor bending over him.

"Is he dead?" Dick asked.

"No, I think he is coming around," was the reply.

"I am glad to hear it. He has passed through enough to kill the average man."

"He would be dead only for this brave young woman."

"Pshaw! no!" Tulip Tilly spoke up.

"If I had not rescued him this gentleman would," indicating Dick.

"You opened the way for us, with that shot of yours," said Dick. "The credit all belongs to you. You are one of the bravest women it has ever been my pleasure to know."

"Flattery, sir, flattery. I will hear no more of it. By the way, who can tell me where I can find Jim Trivet?"

Dick looked at her questioningly.

"Has any one seen him?" he asked of the crowd.

"Not this mornin'," some one spoke up. And it seemed that no one had seen him.

"What do you want with him, if I may ask?" inquired Dick.

"I have discovered something of interest to him."

"Indeed. Then I would like to talk with you in private for a moment, for I can possibly direct you where to look for Trivet."

"I'm your Tulip," was the cheery rejoinder.

She walked off with Dick, and they engaged in conversation for some little time.

When finally they rejoined the men, who, for the most part were assembled near the stockade gate, Dick made inquiry:

"Has anybody seen Dan Buck yet?"

They evidently had not thought of him recently, for all looked about in much surprise.

"Why, no," one man made answer. "He ain't been seen sence he went out of here some while ago, when the lady thar' went after him. Don't she know whar' he is and what keeps him?"

"I have reason to suspect that he has turned traitor to your cause, my friend."

"Gone back on us?"

"Yes."

"Ef he has we'll fix him ef we git him."

"Has Mr. Harding come to?"

"Yes; he is in the office."

"Where is the doctor?"

"He is there with him."

"All right; I will pay him a visit. Whom will you have to take command in my absence?"

"Ther gal."

"Tulip Tilly!"

"She's ther stuff!"

"All right, she will do it, I doubt not. I will leave you in her hands, and you can safely trust her, I think."

"You bet we kin, and will, too."

"And I know that such men are to be relied on anywhere," spoke Tilly.

They gave her a cheer, while Dick went off in the direction of the mine office.

Tulip Tilly mounted to the rude platform from which Harding had been so cruelly jerked with the lasso, as we have set forth, and took a survey of the scene in the direction of the camp.

"They are firing the place!" she suddenly exclaimed.

"Yas, they threatened they would do that," said one man.

"It is a pity to allow them to carry out such a hateful scheme."

"Don't see how we can help it, lady."

"Will you follow me if I lead you in the charge against them? I think we can drive them out of the gulch!"

"It will cost you your life, gal."

"Never mind my life, if you are willing to take some of the risk with me. They deserve the worst we can give them."

"We'll do et, if you say so, gal; you bet. But et won't do ter leave this place onguarded, so we can't all go. We must leave enough men behind to hold the gates if they make an attack while we aire out."

"Yes, we will attend to that, of course. Make ready!"

CHAPTER XVI.

DEADWOOD DICK DROPPED.

In the mean time Deadwood Dick had reached and entered the office.

There he found Harding stretched out on a lounge, with the doctor still busy around him.

The manager was now conscious, but very weak. He motioned Dick to take a seat, and smiled faintly as he realized his weakness after the rough handling he had experienced.

"How are you now?" Dick asked.

"Better," the response. "The doctor says he will pull me out."

"Yes, he is out of danger, but if he had had about thirty seconds more of it I could have done nothing for him."

"And they tell me I owe my rescue to that girl in male attire," the mine manager remarked. "Tell me about it all, will you, sir? Tell me what she did."

Dick complied, telling the whole adventure.

"She is a brave woman," Harding said, when he had heard all. "I want to make her further acquaintance when I get on my pins again. Not your wife, is she, sir? I hope not."

"No, she is merely a friend," answered Dick. "She is a pard worth having, however."

"You had something to say to me?"

"Yes, that is what brought me here."

"Say it."

"You fully trusted that man Buck?"

"I did."

"It looks as if he has played you false."

"How is that? What has he done? Has he gone over to Gibbs' side?"

"No; but he has relieved Gibbs of that paper he held, and has set out to find the box of money."

"The deuce he has!"

"Yes, he has. My pard followed him, but he gave her the slip somehow, and she could not get sight of him again. There is one thing we can do, and only one, and it will mean a risk."

"Name it."

"We must go out and capture the camp and make prisoners of all who will not join us, and then blockade Devil's Gulch."

"And so capture Buck."

"If he has not got away by this time."

"Well, we will do it. I am sorry that I am so weak, for I would like to take part—"

At that instant a wild yell broke on their ears.

And it was so near at hand that it was startling, and so great in volume that it bespoke a large number of men.

"What is that?" cried Harding.

"I'll soon know," answered Dick, leaping to the door.

He was out in an instant, and what he beheld filled him with alarm and anger.

The gates of the stockade were wide

open, and into the grounds was pouring the horde from the camp.

Dick looked to see where Tulip Tilly and her men were, but could not see them, save about a dozen men who had been forced back from the gates and who were seeking cover.

At the head of the horde was Riggle.

"We'll see which dog will come out on top in this hyer ruction, I reckon!" he was shouting. "Come this way, boys, and we'll have the rightful mayor of this camp at liberty in about two wags of a dog's tail! We aire the people yet, you bet, and we'll show 'em!"

"Hold!" ordered Deadwood Dick, covering the men with a brace of revolvers. "Stop, or I fire!"

"Fire and be hanged to you!"

Riggle jumped and dodged as he said it, but when Dick's weapons spoke the man bit the dust.

But Dick could not oppose them all, and a shower of bullets came flying in his direction instantly, several of which took effect, and he dropped to the ground as if dead.

Another fellow had taken Riggle's place immediately, and he led the mob on in the direction of the mine tunnel where Gibbs was a prisoner.

The guardsmen there wisely got out of the way.

In they rushed, and out they came, carrying Gibbs on their shoulders and yelling like Indians.

Dick was meanwhile crawling to the office, where the doctor opened the door for him and helped him in, asking him at once how hard he was hit, to which Dick replied by a sign.

The doctor turned the key in the lock and proceeded forthwith to examine him, stanching the blood of each wound as he found it.

"How is it?" Dick asked.

"You had a close call that time."

"Yes, I know I had; but I got in a good lick."

"You took a big risk."

"I have disposed of the brains that was back of the other side, however, and the rest of the victory ought to be easy now."

"I hope it will be. But they have rescued Welcher."

"And I wish I had escaped getting this, so that I might take further part in this ruction."

"Be thankful that you escaped with your life. I shall have to put you on the shelf here with Harding, and you will have to keep quiet."

There was no help for it, and Dick had to content himself and make the best of a bad situation.

Meantime, not only had the rascals rescued their mayor, but they had taken possession of the mine as well, and were yelling themselves hoarse over their victory.

The firing of some of the buildings in the camp had been a ruse only.

And it had worked successfully.

There came a rap at the door of the office, and the doctor asked who was there.

It proved to be one of the guardsmen who had been watching over the prisoner, and with him were all the men who had been left in the grounds when Tulip Tilly led the others out.

The door was opened, and they came in.

"What is going to be done, boss?" the foremost of them asked.

"We must regain possession immediately, somehow," answered Harding. "How did it ever happen?"

"Let us not stop to question that," said Deadwood Dick. "Hurry and patch me up, doctor," he urged, "and I will drag myself out and take a hand in the matter further."

But at that instant came a terrific explosion.

It shattered the windows of the mine office and fairly made the earth tremble.

All within leaped to the windows to look out, and a great spectacle met their sight. The gates had been blown to atoms, and a third of the mob of invaders lay dead and dying.

And in at the gate rushed Tulip Tilly, mounted, and the men she had led forth came right after her. The tables were turned in an instant of time, and the mine was in possession of its rightful owner once more. But the prisoner was gone.

Those who had escaped the explosion had hastened to a corner, where they stood, huddling like a flock of sheep without a leader.

Tulip Tilly led her men down upon them, and in half a minute had made them prisoners.

In spite of the doctor's injunction, Deadwood Dick staggered out.

The bullets he had received had broken no bones, and as the shock was passing away, he felt much better.

"Good for you, Tulip," he shouted. "You have redeemed yourself gloriously! That explosion did the business for them. Boys, give her a cheer for luck."

And the cheer was given with a will. "But I had nothing to do with the explosion," the girl sport declared.

"You had nothing to do with it?"

"Not a thing."

"Who, then?"

"I don't know. It happened just as we were coming up to the gate, and if we had been two minutes earlier, or even one, we should have come in for a share of the damage."

Here, then, was a matter of mystery. Who had done it?"

CHAPTER XVII.

GIBBS GETS AWAY.

The victims of the explosion were the very worst element of the camp, the utterly worthless.

Such had been the constant followers of the mayor, and their reign of terror had forced otherwise half-decent men to join them, now that the power was broken, it was different.

The prisoners were secured in the tunnel, the wounded were cared for, and the mine was again in the possession of Harding and his supporters.

The former mayor, however, had escaped.

Perhaps a score of men all told out of the mob that had made the attack after the clever ruse had made good their escape.

It was plain that the victory had been won, and that no further attack upon the mine was to be feared. The thing now in order was the arresting of Gibbs again and the discovery of Buck.

Tulip Tilly held a quick conference with Deadwood Dick.

Dick was practically out of the fight, now, but he could still advise and his head was clear.

The girl sport was more than willing to carry the warfare further, and in a little time she was leading a force of men down into the camp to find and arrest the remainder of the rascals.

The rebels had won the victory, and the camp would soon be under new government.

Down into the camp she rode, at the head of her men, and they were more than eager to follow her, for they had seen enough of her bravery to give them all confidence in her.

That she had been the victim of the deception played by Riggle did not detract

from her worth in their eyes, for they had all been equal partners with her in that. And they were all eager to redeem the loss they had sustained in their pride by further achievement.

As they neared the camp a wounded man raised himself up and loudly called out:

"Gal! Tulip! Come here!"

The girl sport looked and saw it was Dan Buck.

She rode over to him at once, glad to find him and eager to hear what he would say.

"I am hard hit," the fellow spoke, as soon as she came up, "but I want to help you out. Go straight to Devil's Gulch for Paul Gibbs."

"He has gone there?"

"Yes, to get the box of money."

"Then he has the papers?"

"Yes, yes; we had a fight; I got the worst of it, as you see, and he took 'em."

"Which way did he go?"

"That way," indicating. "But send half of your men the other way, so as to cut off his escape."

"Good! I will do it. What can I do for you?"

"Have a couple of your men carry me to the mine office, for I must see Sam Harding before I die."

"All right, it shall be done."

"And you want to try to bring that fellow in alive, if you can do it. I have a score to settle with him."

"Such is our intention if we can get hold of him. We will probably cap off this ruction with hanging him as high as we can swing him, for, in my opinion, he deserves it."

Two of the men were detailed to carry Buck to the mine, and Tulip Tilly pressed on with the rest of her force, heading for Devil's Gulch.

When the two men reached the mine, Buck called at once for the doctor.

"I want to know how long I can live," he said.

"My poor fellow you have got it bad," was the response. "You will very likely die by night."

"Do you think I will live an hour or two?"

"Oh, yes; no doubt of that, I guess."

"I don't want you to make a mistake."

"I feel sure you will linger for several hours."

"Good enough. I have a confession to make before I pass in, but I want the mayor brought in before I make it, if I can live that long. If not, or if you see any signs that I am going to peter out, call Harding at once."

"Very well, I will," said the doctor.

He did what he could for the wounded man, and left him lying in the shade of the fence, where he had asked to be put down.

Meantime, Tulip Tilly had pressed on.

Dividing her men, she had both ends of the deep part of the gulch guarded, and with half a dozen sturdy fellows she entered the dismal place.

They had arranged to make as little noise as possible, and they proceeded with scarcely a sound that could be heard a dozen yards away, even by the sharpest of human ears.

Tulip Tilly was in the lead.

Suddenly she held up her finger, and she crouched down with her hand on a gun.

She remained thus for some moments, and motioned then for the others to advance stealthily to where she stood, which they did with all possible caution.

She pointed to a ledge above where they were.

There was seen the erstwhile mayor of the camp, with a map in hand, moving

along the ledge pace by pace, as if counting.

Some bushes screened the watchers, and they were reasonably safe from discovery as long as they remained perfectly quiet. And they would do that, naturally, obeying their leader.

It was not far from the spot where Deadwood Dick and his pard had made their stand on the previous night.

It had been by that very ledge that Nancy Jane had made her strange disappearance.

She had stumbled upon it in the dark after leaving Dick's side.

Welcher, still to call him by that name for the time being, moved this way and that on the ledge, apparently carefully measuring and counting, while he compared two pieces of paper which he had in his hand.

This he kept up for a considerable time, advancing, receding, to the left, to the right, till finally he folded the papers and put them into his pocket.

That done, he laid himself flat down on the ledge and looked over.

He leaned far out, holding fast to the rough rocky projections to insure himself against a fall while he did so.

In that manner he moved along the ledge to the right, feeling every inch of the way with extreme care, as if for something that was loose, for he seemed to try every projection.

Presently he was heard to exclaim.

A stone had moved under his touch, and he drew out a slab of rock of considerable size and weight.

This he allowed to drop, having the use of only one arm, without looking or thinking as to where it stopped, and it came within a short distance of where Tulip Tilly was crouching, but the girl did not budge.

Some of her companions had less nerve, and dodged, making a noise, but the noise did not attract attention, as the stone itself made considerable of a racket in the bushes and on the rocky bottom of the gulch, and the man above paid no attention to it.

He was reaching into the cavity made by the displacement of the stone, in search of something.

Those below watched him narrowly.

Presently he was seen to pull something to the front from the back recesses of the niche.

As it came to sight under his exertions, those below could see that it was a box, and when he had gotten it well to the front he put forth all his exertion to lift it to the ledge.

He got it clear of the little shelf below, but he was leaning so far out that it was impossible for him to rise up with it with one arm, and neither could he replace it again where it had been before. He was heard to utter a grated imprecation, and then the box dropped.

Down it came, as the stone had done, with a crash, and Tulip Tilly remained as immovable as before.

And she whispered a word of caution to her companions.

They remained silent and immovable, and for some moments they saw the man looking down. Then with an oath he got up and made off along the trail to the right, and Tulip Tilly knew that he was coming down to secure the prize.

Would he get it? He would—where Adam wore the apple.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HAPPY TERMINATION REACHED.

As soon as the man had disappeared Tulip turned to her men.

"Now we have got him dead to rights,"

she said. "He could not handle his prize with his one arm, and he is coming down for it."

"And then we will down him, fer fair," spoke one of the men. "We will get him as neat as wax before he knows what has happened to him. It is half dark here, anyhow."

"Yes, we have it all our own way, now," said Tulip. "Where is the box?"

"Right here et is, miss," said another.

"Is it whole?"

"Yes; et seems ter be bound around with iron."

"It is a wonder that the fall did not split it all to splinters. Now, I want two of the strongest of you to be ready to nab him when the best chance offers, and when you do that I will clap a gun to his head."

"Kerreck, miss; we savvy."

They arranged their positions as quickly and as silently as possible and waited.

In due time steps were heard, and the fellow came along down the gulch at a rapid pace, which he reduced as he came near the bushes, looking up and measuring his position by the ledge above.

He could see the little opening the removal of the slab of stone had left.

Gauging it with his eye, he located the spot directly under it, and pushed his way into the thickest of the bushes in order to come where the box would naturally have fallen.

His judgment was in no wise at fault in that respect; he would have discovered the box beyond a doubt if something had not been there in the way of his doing it, but he was not given sufficient opportunity, for suddenly he was seized by strong hands.

He uttered a cry of rage and alarm.

"No use yer squealin'," he was told.

"We hev' got ye."

"Let me go," the fellow begged. "Let me go and I will make a divide with you."

"Nary a let go," said Tulip Tilly, who had pressed a gun to his head. "We have got the whole business, and you in the bargain, so a divide is of no use. Your name is Dennis."

"What are you going to do with me, then?"

"Take you back to Reilley, of course."

"No, no; do not do that; give me a show. I have come out at the little end of the horn the worst way, in this game, and I have fared about as badly as I can."

"No matter, you are in for the full dose, and back to the camp you must go. Get hold of that box, boys, and bring it along, for I have no doubt it will tell something worth knowing about the matter. And what it does not tell, Dan Buck will no doubt supply."

"Dan Buck!" exclaimed the prisoner.

"Yes; the man you robbed and left dying when you came here," was the response.

Needless to quote their further talk, as they returned, since it did not avail the prisoner anything. He had to submit to the inevitable.

On reaching the camp, they proceeded straight to the grounds of the mine, where it was found that Samuel Harding had just been called to hear what Dan Buck had to say, as the doctor had decided that Buck had only a little while longer to live and had so informed him.

Buck saw them as they came in.

"There he is," he said. "Have him brought right here, and I will make a confession."

So the prisoner was taken there, and when he looked upon the man on the ground his face seemed pale and he seemed as if about to drop to the ground.

Evidently he knew what was coming, and what would be the result to follow.

Dan Buck raised himself to his elbow, and, pointing at the man, said:

"That man is not Ben Welcher, any more than I am. He is Paul Gibbs, one of the worst cut-throats in the whole West."

"You lie!" cried the prisoner. "You are in league with all the rest to cheat me out of my rights here!"

"No, I do not lie, as the true Ben Welcher can prove. Mr. Harding, drop your disguise and show who you really are and give this man a surprise."

Harding was surprised himself.

He gave a start, staring hard at Buck, and as he did so a pallor overcame his face.

"You know me," he said.

"Yes, I know you, Ben Welcher."

"Then who in the name of Heaven are you?"

"I am Doc Dalton, your former pard, who betrayed you."

"And you dare to confess it!"

"I do; I am out of your reach. But, listen, and you will see that I long ago repented, and have been a long time trying to right the wrong against terrible odds. And now it has been brought about, though I have cut a small figure in it all."

He had to pause to rest.

"I was a rascal at heart—that I admit. When Gibbs tempted me to put you out of the way, I fell easily. But I intended then to dispose of him and have the whole thing to myself. But he was too much for me. Finding that I could not accomplish that, I resolved that he should not gain the mine for himself. And then when I penetrated your disguise, Ben, I made up my mind to work for you and right the wrong."

He had to pause again, and longer.

"It was I who placed the powder under the ground near the gates. I determined that if he ever got possession, I would blow him and his men to kingdom come, and give you another show. And I did it, as you saw. I was laying to get that half of the paper from him, and find the box and put it into your possession, but I could not do that. I could not confess to you who I was, for you would not have trusted me, and I was afraid that I would only betray you, for he would have murdered you with as little concern as he has killed many another man in his time. He came near winning his game, but—but—"

He choked, his head fell back, and he was dead.

Harding turned away to hide the emotion his face would betray, and walked to some distance.

When he came back he had command of his voice, and, turning to the crowd, he took up the statement where death had cut short Dalton's part of it.

"It is true that I am Ben Welcher," he said. "But, for the reasons which must be plain to you all, it was impossible for me to admit my identity, as this rascal had control of the whole town. I am also the man who has been known to you as Jim Trivet. In that guise I have sought to get possession of the papers that would give me the clear and right title to the mine. But it was impossible, for Gibbs was too many for me. It was all I could do to hold the mine against him, and I would not have been able to do that if it had not been for the backing my trusted men gave me. But, if I could not accomplish it myself, I found some one who could."

As he said this he indicated Deadwood Dick.

"Boys," he said, "let me introduce this gentleman to you by his right and proper name. You know him as Felix Fox, but in reality he is no other than the notorious Deadwood Dick, Junior. He, with his brave girl pard, known to you as Tulip

Tilly, had accomplished what I could not do."

There was immediately a rousing cheer for Deadwood Dick and his pard.

"I will take only a small portion of the honors," said Dick. "It belongs rightfully to Nancy Jane. Seems to me she has played the leading role this time, and she certainly carried it to a finish after I was laid on the shelf."

"And to her I owe my life," avowed Harding, still to call him that. "Deadwood Dick, if I can win her regard, you shall not take her away with you when you depart, you can count on that!"

A flush mounted to the face of the young woman as she heard these words.

Gibbs was given a trial, and no less than seven murders were brought home to him fairly and positively, therefore he was hanged—justly so. The box of money did contain the original papers of the mine, and the true Welcher came into rightful possession.

There was a wedding, and Dick lost his pard.

He remained there until fully recovered from his wounds; then he set out on a new quest, from which came a string of strange adventures and perils.

Happy Harkins was about the happiest man in town while he lived, but that was not a great while, for whisky downed him at last—after he had downed whisky for a good many years, as he jestingly put it.

Over his grave they put a slab, on which was rudely carved,

"HAPPY HARKINS."

while all around his mound was placed a row of empty bottles, with necks in the ground.

THE END.

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